

# EIGHT HOURS QUESTION

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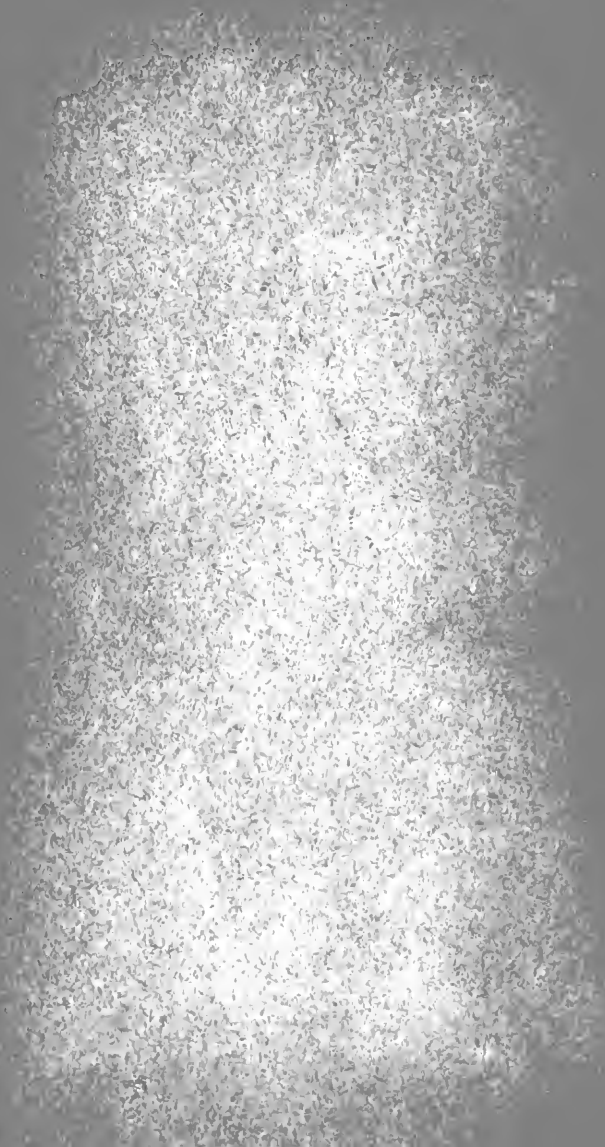


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THE  
EIGHT HOURS QUESTION



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THE  
EIGHT HOURS QUESTION

BY  
JOHN M. ROBERTSON

AUTHOR OF "MODERN HUMANISTS," "THE FALLACY OF SAVING," ETC.



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## PREFACE.

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IT is a very remarkable fact that an agitation which in scope and economic importance comes near the movement for the repeal of the Corn Laws, is going on with hardly any critical comment from our leading economists. The following pages, in so far as they are controversial, deal mainly with the arguments of Socialist and other light skirmishers in the economic field, because there is little other argumentation to deal with. The "Fathers" have scarcely spoken. Various conclusions may be drawn from the fact, but I will merely suggest that there is likely to be the usual proportion of fallacies in the pioneer reasonings; and in undertaking to show a number of these fallacies on one side, I cannot expect to escape others on my own. If this essay should at all force the discussion towards greater circumspection, it will have done its part. First partly published in journalistic form, it has since received such development and rectification as I can give it.

In submitting it to my fellow-Radicals, and to the friends of social reform generally, I would at the outset implore them to look at the question as one of science and not of sentiment. In a discussion on the

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theme at the National Liberal Club, I was told by several philanthropic speakers that I ought to look at it in a more idealistic spirit, which seemed to mean that we ought to speak more of what we should like to do than of what can be done. There has been plenty of that kind of idealism in human affairs: the field of history is strewn with the wrecks of such idealisms; and it is a little disquieting to see how many friends of reform are still disposed to try legislative experiments merely because they are humanely conceived, without staying to consider their chances. If, however, the avowal of an ideal be any passport to the ear of such enthusiasts, I can claim to have mine; and I hope they will recognise it even in the following pages. Some of them are apt to assume that he who does not wear his heart upon his sleeve has no heart to wear. But, at the risk of incurring their ban, I am more inclined to apologise for importing ethical feeling into an economic discussion than for making it subordinate there.

JOHN M. ROBERTSON.

*February, 1893.*

# CONTENTS.

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CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE - - - - -	V
I. THE TROUBLE AND THE HOPE - - - - -	I
II. HISTORICAL AND GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS -	11
III. THE HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT - - - - -	18
IV. THE VARIOUS SCHEMES - - - - -	26
V. THE BEST ACCREDITED PLEA - - - - -	36
VI. THE PLAN OF PARTICULAR LEGISLATION: RAIL- WAYS AND MINES - - - - -	43
VII. THE PROJECT OF GENERAL LEGISLATION: THE MAIN ECONOMIC FORCE - - - - -	52
VIII. THE CLASSES OF INDUSTRY SEPARATELY CON- SIDERED - - - - -	61
IX. INDUSTRIES SEPARATELY CONSIDERED: FOREIGN COMPETITION - - - - -	78
X. INDUSTRIES SEPARATELY CONSIDERED: HOME COMPETITIVE INDUSTRIES - - - - -	101
XI. THE EFFECTS OF FIXED HOURS ON TRADE FLUCTUA- TIONS - - - - -	106
XII. THE POLITICAL SIDE OF THE CASE - - - - -	112
XIII. THE POPULATION CRUX - - - - -	123
XIV. SOCIALISM AND THE POPULATION QUESTION -	136
XV. INDUSTRY AND ART--CONCLUSION - - - - -	145



# THE EIGHT HOURS QUESTION.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE TROUBLE AND THE HOPE.

#### I.

FOR several years past, much has been heard in this and other industrial countries of a plan for improving the position of the wage-earning classes by passing a law, as general as may be, restricting to eight hours the day's work of everyone employed on salary for purposes of manufacture and commerce. And there can be little doubt that, be it good or bad, the proposal will be still more discussed in the immediate future. Its hearing is secured by that sense of pressure and struggle which, through all ups and downs of trade activity, grows upon nearly all classes who have to earn their living. The sense of pressure is, of course, relative to the standard of comfort that has become usual in each class ; and the great increase in the class living either wholly or in old age on interest, with the correlative decline in the rate of interest,

means a sense of struggle on a plane of comparative "comfort," as the phrase goes; while the skilled worker to-day, when he works shorter hours than his predecessors, has to work harder, and in many instances will choose to work hard and long rather than go back to low rates of wages. Among the unskilled class, the position of individuals is perhaps no worse than it ever was; but the class grows ever larger, and so its lot makes a stronger impression on the general consciousness. Thus in all classes struggle and exigency are prevailing conditions. It is not merely among the hand-workers, skilled or unskilled, that the pinch is felt. The ordinary citizen hears in his ordinary experience of far more cases of hardship than he can hope to relieve. Thousands of unclassified strugglers, with no regular trade; thousands of low-classed workers, without unions, are for ever in the grip of want. Women of the lower middle-classes suffer in countless instances from an almost hopeless penury; so that there are hundreds of applications for every sort of place they can take. If they try to enter the class of "working-women" specially so-called, they find the same pressure, and there their entrance worsens it. Women half-supported compete for places with women unsupported. Every new line of work, artistic or mechanical, is speedily choked. Of teachers there is always an over-supply, and thousands of young women have their lives darkened by the disappointment which this involves. As for the overwork in special industries—special, that is, in being off the line of simple production—it is heart-breaking to contemplate. Never in the world's history

did a great nation seem to taste so little of the fruitions of life, and so much of the mere toil of it, as ours. In the long-run, certain main results are traceable, as ill-health and emigration, which are the sinister safety-valves of social over-pressure, and the predominating presence of the more mechanical industries, the more commercial professions, and the more vulgar forms of the arts, as against the higher, the more intellectual, and the more skill-demanding. A hard-driven people must have unsubtle pleasures, if any.

## II.

This outcome of a continual advance in our nominal command of the energies of Nature is the ground and pretext of far more extensive schemes of betterment than that of an Eight Hours Law. But the Eight Hours plan appeals to a far wider audience than any comprehensive scheme can yet obtain. To the great mass of the poorer workers, over-worked and pinched, its rationale seems simple, its utility clear. It fits in with half the objections made by employers to appeals for shorter hours or larger wages. The shop-keeper avows that he would gladly close sooner if only all his neighbours would; but he knows that if he does, others will take advantage of him. Employers tell their men that the ever-increasing stress of competition, which has year by year been cutting down their profits, must finally tell on wages. In a recent strike of timber-porters at Bristol, this was the position of the masters, who pointed to the increased use of machinery at other ports. And at a mass

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meeting in the open-air, I heard one of the most popular labour leaders virtually admit the force of this plea, by declaring to the men that all that was wanted was that all the masters should combine to resist the cutting down of prices. That is to say, the labour leader called upon the masters to form a "ring." He could not or would not see that the masters, who would be glad enough to form a ring if they could, are in the grip of the current as truly as the men, inasmuch as there are always new-comers who upset rings by underselling, and always workers who are glad to be employed by the new masters, and ready to buy their cheaper products in preference to the dearer. The workers, looking at the larger income of the masters, revolt at the difference ; making no account of the thousands of competitors who get crushed out in the employing class as in the employed, and staying not to calculate what the successful masters' profits (as distinguished from rent and interest) would run to if distributed in wages. So their first thought is to strike. But a strike is only a means of finding out whether profits have been cut down to the point at which employers cannot be found willing to go on ; and it naturally happens that in many cases the employers have accurately gauged the situation, and the men fail. Even a successful strike may sometimes mean that a rise of price, consequent on serious stoppage of supply, makes it possible for employers to go on at a profit where they had none before. Of course a strike is at times a means of forcing down or forcing out an obstinate employer, who will not consent to take less profits ; but by



common consent the wars of labour are like those of nations, usually calamities to victors as well as to vanquished. There are always the slain and the wounded, however loud the pæans of the rest.

Here, then, lies the *primâ facie* strength of the case for an Eight Hours Law. Let a law be made *forcing* everybody to work shorter hours, and there *must* result, the worker thinks, a relief for masters and men alike, or at least for men. The shopkeeper can no longer plead his helplessness. The manufacturer surely *must* employ more men, and so wages must rise, since labour will be in extra demand. If prices should rise, they will probably not rise so much as to balance the rise in wages; and as for the "general consumer," who may have to pay more without getting a rise of income, the workers owe small consideration to him. As for the plea of individual liberty, the workers know too well how hollow is the significance of that as against the overwhelming force of the struggle for existence, which makes their liberty at most a choice of hardships, and to the upper-class alone means a choice of either measure or mode of activity, to say nothing of leisure and joy. If all may fitly be taxed, why may not all be subjected to a restriction on working hours, in the interest of all? So runs the argument, or so it may run, for it is often ill put, even from the point of view of the pleaders. Is it sound? Does it take in all the essential facts, and does it follow from them truly?

## III.

At the outset, I am fain to call the attention of reformers in general to the fact that this agitation is going far to swallow up, for the time, those others which advanced Radicals had been wont to regard as the most vital. It has left the movement for taxation of ground values well-nigh becalmed; it has made the plea for a graduated income tax inaudible. Beside this, the suggested nationalisation of land and of railways has no attraction for any body of labour voters. To stretch a metaphor that has done good service, bread-and-butter politics have over-ridden beef-and-soup politics. The worker's politics are rightly concerned with his well-being: the question is whether he judges rightly of his course. And it will not be denied that there are few cases on record of sound sociological conceptions being reached, either by the masses or by their governors, within a few years of the broaching of the problems implied.<sup>1</sup> The economic expedients of the governing classes in past ages were usually those which seemed proper to most men of the day; and the laws to prevent the export of bullion, and to keep exports of goods above imports, were good in the sight of most citizens, though

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<sup>1</sup> I am quite aware that the principle of restriction of hours has been agitated for generations, and that the Eight Hours Law, in particular, has been talked of for a good many years; but it is certain that the bulk of its support has come to it within the last half-dozen.

we perceive them to-day as attempts to make water run up-hill, merely to stay there. Those expedients were empirically plausible, and would have been approved of by the trade guilds of the time had these been consulted on the subject. In our day there has arisen among Radicals a not unjustified faith in the soundness of popular political demands; and the faith is one I should be sorry to help to shake, if the doing so made room for the contrary faith, of old standing. But the candid reader will admit a difference of kind between proposals which assert political rights and are opposed as striking at established privileges, and proposals which affirm that certain economic results will follow on certain legislation. On a claim of political rights, a popular instinct will usually be sound and just: on a question of economic law it is probably as fallible as that of any other class. Such, at least, was the opinion of Mill, who was perhaps sounder in his sympathies than in his economics.

And there is another general consideration, preliminary to our investigation, which it may be well to keep in view. The Eight Hours Law is a scheme solely for the manufacturing and exchanging industries, and for the mining: it has nothing to do with the lot of the agricultural population. That is to say, a scheme aiming avowedly at a general betterment of the lot of working-people deals almost solely with the management of secondary industries, not at all with the first, closest, and most vital of industrial relations to Nature. These facts are in no way conclusive, but they are suggestive.

While, however, there is this one-sidedness about

the Eight Hours Movement, there can be no question about its popularity in the towns and the mining districts. About the raising of the question, therefore, there can be no misgiving such as that with which one asks for a hearing on some fundamental issue of life or belief. Few will take up the fundamental issues if they can help it; but here is a "practical" problem that now faces every elector who is concerned about his vote. It is not (as we shall see) that the practical issue does not lead us further when we follow it out; but it comes in the guise of a political cry, not of a thinker's theory, and so it cannot but be listened to. He who ignores it must be a lamed specialist, a trifler, a dreamer, or a dullard. The Socialist societies have taken it up—a course which could not well have been foreseen from their principles, or from their practice a few years ago. Among the skilled as among the unskilled trades, it appears to make headway; and already there is a small literature of discussion upon it.<sup>1</sup> But the need for the publication of the following chapters, first written before some of the later books on the subject appeared, seems to me on the whole greater, and not less, than when I began them, though some of the newer books coincide a good deal with my conclu-

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<sup>1</sup> Of books, as distinguished from pamphlets, I may specify Messrs. Webb & Cox's "The Eight Hours Day" (Scott), Messrs. Hadfield & Gibbins' "A Shorter Working Day" (Methuen), and Mr. H. M. Thompson's "The Theory of Wages" (Macmillan), which turns largely on this question. I shall have occasion to refer to various essays and pamphlets.

sions. While these books are more judicial than the earlier publications with which I have dealt, I am constrained to think that they overlook part of the economics of the question, and thus leave even their own conclusions imperfectly established. It is for the reader who will follow me to judge.

#### IV.

Only one warning is necessary to the more hasty friends of the Eight Hours Movement. It is possible to criticise this movement, not because of a wish to do for the workers less than it proposes, but because of a wish to do more. If any bias has affected my inquiry, it is the latter and not the former. The ideal that guides or misguides my own constructive proposals is one of a state of things in which considerably less than eight hours should have to be worked per day in mechanical or toilsome employments. That the workers should have more leisure is assuredly one of the first conditions of social betterment. And so strongly do I feel this that I should decline even to discuss the objection sometimes made to an Eight Hours Law, that the men would be apt to misuse the leisure given them. It is deplorable that such arguments should ever be resorted to. If some men should misuse their leisure, they would be doing no worse than many in the educated and opulent classes have always done hitherto; and to keep them without leisure, for pure fear lest they should misuse leisure, would be the very imbecility of conservatism. It is a necessary condition of their profiting by leisure at

all that they should have it to begin with ; and the waste that may arise must just be set down to the loss side in the ever two-sided account of civilisation. Leisure for the toilers is a primary aspiration of every reformer. The first question is not, How will it be used, but, How is it to be secured ?

## CHAPTER II.

### HISTORICAL AND GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

#### I.

Two historical facts, or opinions, count for much in the agitation for an Eight Hours Law: the belief that at one time, about five hundred years ago, artisans and labourers in this country had an ordinary working day of eight hours, and were paid for overtime; and the fact that the very long hours worked in the first half of the present century, by both children and adults, were effectively modified by law.

On the first head, the principal authority is the late Professor Thorold Rogers,<sup>1</sup> who is cited by Messrs. Webb & Cox, and Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield. Rogers noticed that in the documents he studied for the agricultural economy of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the wages paid in December and January were about 25 per cent. less than during the rest of the year, and he observes that "this fact, which I have frequently noticed, is proof that the hours of labour were not long." He further noticed

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<sup>1</sup> "Six Centuries of Work and Wages," pp. 180, 542; "Work and Wages" (chapters of former work), pp. 28, 175.

that at a later period than that first dealt with, extra time was paid for at a rate per hour which, on the ordinary wages, would mean a working day of eight hours, if the extra pay were reckoned to be a little in excess, as at present.

Now, it is not in any way conclusive as to the present-day problem whether or not the workers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had or had not during these centuries an ordinary Eight Hours Day; and it would be somewhat comforting to believe they had; but on the simple question of fact it is not easy to come to Rogers' conclusion. The fact of the wages being lowered 25 per cent. for December and January only, he seems to have held to imply that, as the hours of light in these months are about seven or eight, the working hours (allowing time for meals), would be five or six; in which case full wages would be for about eight hours. But everything depends on what the class of labour was, and on this Rogers is not explicit. If it was agricultural labour, the lessened pay would not be so much for shorter light-time, since November and February are also months of short light, as for suspended operations. December and January are the slack months of the agricultural year, and the time of Yule festivities.

As to the wages, again, it is not easy to see how Rogers could calculate with certainty, in view of the money unit. Before the Black Death, in the fourteenth century, he tells us<sup>1</sup> the rate of wages for thatchers was "about a penny a day:" after the

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<sup>1</sup> "Work and Wages," p. 20,



Plague it rose to 2½d.<sup>1</sup> But of necessity it gradually fell; and whether we consider the penny rate, or the peculiar conditions of the time of high wages, when the labourers were, in Rogers' words, "masters of the situation," it is not easy to see how we can make sure of the usage during two centuries for labourers in general. About other wages for field labour he admits there are difficulties in the documents.<sup>2</sup>

## II.

Another of Rogers' historical inferences is worth notice in this connection. Speaking of old house-building, he writes<sup>3</sup>:—

"The quality of the work in the old times of which I have written is unquestionable. It stands to this day as a proof of how excellent ancient masonry was. The building, from the construction of which I have inferred so much as to work and wages, is still standing as it was left four centuries ago. I am persuaded that such perfect masonry would have been incompatible with a long hours day."

There is indeed much force in the contention that in some industries a shorter working day might easily mean better work—a point to which we shall return. But, to begin with, it is not clear that masonry is one of these occupations; and in the next place, the argument from the survival of *some* ancient masonry is a plain fallacy. If Rogers were right we ought to have had *much* masonry from the period of

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<sup>1</sup> Artisans got much more, carpenters at Windsor in 1408 getting 6d. a day (p. 28).    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 175.

which he speaks. But we have not. Carlyle in the same way argued that because his father-in-law's furniture was of excellent make, labour in those days was honester than now, when so much furniture is flimsy. But Carlyle also held that his father did excellent mason-work ; and it is pretty certain that his father worked much more than eight hours a day. As to the old furniture, he was only helping to illustrate the variety of ways in which men can contrive to be absurd. Such old furniture will be likely to survive as was well made ; and if it was well made it must have been well paid for. The elder Welsh was a wise man, who, in ordering his furniture, would give a good price to a good man. But Scotch carpenters in his time certainly worked more than eight hours a day. Carlyle could have had excellent furniture made in his own day if he had given his order and paid the proper price ; but he was penurious, and probably would never do this. There must have been plenty of bad work done in the past as now, though probably not so much, even proportionally. Adulteration and docking are old arts. Falstaff found lime in his sack ; and four or five hundred years ago Scotch hide-exporters got all Scotch hides an ill name by shortening them. Much of the house-building of previous centuries was certainly flimsy. What is pronounced good in old masonry was so largely because sound mortar lime was used. In our jerry-building, the lime and plaster are the things most adulterated ; and if they were made good, our building would be very much better than it is. Even our jerry-builders lay better foundations

and build more truly than their solidier predecessors : you may find strongly-built London houses of past generations in which there is no proper foundation : the new houses, cheaply built, stand because they are built more scientifically, barring only bad materials. But the important economic outcome of all this is our main point, to wit, the fact that long hours and bad work are alike the outcome of certain tendencies in our life, which a mere Eight Hours Law will not alter.

### III.

If the old labourers of whom Rogers speaks *had* the short day he thinks they had, there can only be one explanation, or one twofold explanation. They could insist on short hours as they could insist on high wages, because their number had been greatly cut down by the Plague, both absolutely and proportionally to the employing classes. Save in the last respect, their position would be economically analogous to that of the workers now in Australia, where the relative security of labour and abundant field of employment, not yet overtaken by the proletariat despite rapid immigration, enables them generally to insist on an Eight Hours Day, and to secure good wages. In Elizabeth's time, according to Rogers himself, the position of the labourers was considerably worse. Broadly speaking, it is held by him to have got progressively worse still, down to the present century, with some ups and downs. Certainly the worst phases of artisan overwork arose in the end of last century and the beginning of this, after the application of

steam to factory uses. And why? Because the new openings for labour, accompanied as they were by bettering conditions of life on the side of civil peace and sanitation, permitted of an immense increase of population, and this increase took place before there were any of the facilities of emigration which later relieved the strain. These facts are obstinately ignored by what some call "the new economics"—as if either old or new economists were all of one mind. The sequelæ of Factory Legislation are pointed to without any investigation of cause and effect; and it is assumed that because there has been improvement in the past there must be improvement in the future, given only certain restrictive legislation, no matter what the other conditions may be. Yet it is easy to show, and it will appear in our inquiry, that but for the advent of certain new conditions, notably the opening of new fields for emigration and new markets for produce, our earlier Factory Legislation would only have produced new forms of evil. The advocates of that legislation do not seem to have had any foresight, though the results seem to justify them. Merely to prevent children and women from working is not to provide for the feeding of these women and children. The prevention was indeed justifiable and laudable—I make no demur on that head;—but the act, as regards the actors, partook of the nature of the plan of closing all public-houses without opening places of recreation. And a main purpose of the present argument is, not to resist the shortening of hours of labour, but to show that the shortening of hours of labour by law, either on the assumption that

concurrent favourable conditions *must* arise now as they did in previous years, or, as is almost always the case, without any perception of the function of concurrent conditions at all, is to court a great disaster and a grievous disappointment.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT.

#### I.

It is not proposed here to write a detailed history of the movement for an Eight Hours Day, as such a history is to be found in the volumes of Messrs. Webb & Cox, and Gibbins & Hadfield, which, on points of narrative, I believe to be trustworthy. But there are some of the historical facts which specially challenge notice when we make a study of the economics of the problem. It is significant, for instance, that at the Swansea Trade Union Congress of 1887 the resolution proposed (and not carried) was simply "that the hours of labour in all *Government works* should be reduced to eight per day," though as early as 1871 the London Congress had unanimously resolved that "the productive powers and skill of the operatives of this country have arrived at a state of perfection which guarantees that eight hours labour a day will answer all the commercial, national, and domestic requirements of the population." An amendment proposing a *general* Eight Hours Law was rejected by 76 votes to 29, but an amendment proposing a plebiscitum was carried. This was acted upon, but the inquiry set on foot was ignored by very many of

the unions, and more than half of the 17,267 votes in favour of a legal Eight Hours Limit (understood to be of general application) came from one union, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. Only one large society, that of the Stirlingshire Miners, voted unanimously for both an Eight Hours Limit and an Eight Hours Law. A fresh plebiscitum was then ordered.

Next, at the London International Trade Union Congress of November, 1888, a resolution was carried by a majority in favour of an Eight Hours Law in *all industries* ("every case" was the expression used), while at the same time it came out, despite the cross-voting, that a larger majority of delegates was in favour of an Eight Hours Day for all State and municipal employments. At the Dundee Trade Union Congress of the following year, the report of the fresh plebiscitum showed 28,511 for an Eight Hours Law (as distinguished from an Eight Hours Limit), and 67,390 against *even the Eight Hours Limit*, and so *à fortiori* against the law. The return, however, was rejected, on the ground that no attempt had been made by the officials of the textile unions to ascertain the opinions of the members, the entire membership (56,541) having been returned as against the law; and the Congress passed a resolution in favour of an Eight Hours Law for *miners only*. Meantime, among the miners themselves the demand was opposed by those of Northumberland and Durham, who had already an Eight Hours Day for hewers.

Next, at the Liverpool Trade Union Congress of 1890, a resolution in favour of an Eight Hours Law

for *all trades* was carried by a considerable majority, largely representative of unskilled trades,<sup>1</sup> which had of late joined the unionist ranks in large numbers. At the same Congress, a resolution in favour of an Eight Hours Law for miners was again carried by an overwhelming majority. The case of the railwaymen, whose hours are out of comparison harder than those of miners, is thus always postponed to that of the miners, many of whom work less than eight hours a day already.

In all of these discussions, as Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield point out,<sup>2</sup> there has been a strong body of feeling against legal action; and at the Newcastle Congress of 1891, where the previous resolution for an Eight Hours Law for *all trades* was repeated, the majority, even in demanding legal action, qualified the demand first by a suggestion of permissive clauses, and finally by agreeing to let the union of any particular trade refuse the law by *ballot vote*.

There are thus two preliminary questions to be considered: (1) How do the workers expect a permissive law to operate? and (2) Why are the miners so invariably selected for preliminary legislation when a general law is also being demanded?

## II.

To neither of these questions is there even the pretence of an answer, either from the out-and-out

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<sup>1</sup> Messrs. Webb & Cox quote from Mr. John Burns (p. 35) a statement which, professing to state the "character of the majority," carefully leaves that undescribed. <sup>2</sup> Pp. 38, 39.



advocates of the Eight Hours Law or from the friendly critics. Yet it is of great importance that both should be answered. For, in the first place, if trades are to be left to enforce and abandon an Eight Hours Law at their choice, there is an end of the plea that the object in view is more leisure, and work for the unemployed. That is to say, if any one trade is to be free to apply the law at pleasure, and set it aside at pleasure, the law will merely be a means of restricting output or raising wages at particular times chosen by the workers. Besides, if the workers look to putting on and taking off the law at will, they will merely be doing by the machinery of the law what they could just as well do by experimentally striking for lower hours and waiving the question of wages. For if they enforce the law, with the result that wages tend to fall, they have no remedy against the fall save a strike, which they say they are unwilling to resort to; and if they recognise the possibility that the law *may* lower wages, and are prepared in that case to go back to longer hours, they are admitting that the question is from the start one of wages. It is not on record that any union has asked the masters at what reduction of wages they would be prepared to reduce the working day to eight hours; yet such an inquiry would be the first that would suggest itself, were it not that lessened wages are all round felt to be a death-blow to the shorter working day.

It may be, of course, that the Newcastle Congress meant that a trade should be allowed to take or reject the Eight Hours Law, but should be bound to

abide by its decision; but it is difficult to see how such a view can be entertained by practical men. Supposing a minority in a recalcitrant trade were changed to a majority, the new majority would consider itself unjustly treated if it were debarred from applying the law. Again, supposing a trade found that the application of the law caused them a loss in wages, how could it be proposed that the law should be enforced if the masters and men were alike willing to return to longer hours?

I can well understand why the more zealous advocates of the restrictive law should be opposed to the permissive principle, for from their point of view it will stultify their plan. With an Eight Hours Law going and not going in this trade and that trade according as business seems to fluctuate, it will be impossible to test or verify their thesis that a general restriction of hours will increase the demand for labour; and the arbitrary fluctuations of output that must needs result would go far to derange production all over. Yet the alternative to this state of things would be a no less arbitrary influence upon production in general, since the workers themselves admit that an Eight Hours Law, if general, is bound to affect different trades in very different degrees. The dilemma is thus complete; and yet the spokesmen of the workers do not seem to recognise that there is a dilemma at all, or at least do nothing to resolve it

### III.

There is, finally, the problem of the peculiar position of the miners. It is established by the return drawn

up by Mr. George Howell, M.P.,<sup>1</sup> that "in no district except South Wales" do miners, "working at the face (*i.e.*, hewing the coal), work more than 48 hours per week, allowing 39 minutes as the average time for descending, travelling underground, and returning to the surface; and even in South Wales the time from bank to bank is put at 49½ hours."<sup>2</sup> Barring errors in the figures,<sup>3</sup> it is anything but clear why the miners should be selected by the trades in general as the industry most needing to be protected from long hours; and it is much to be regretted that Messrs. Hadfield & Gibbins, who have "little doubt" that before long a Miners Act will be passed, should be content to notice the "curious fact" that the miners have least to gain from such an Act, without making any attempt to find out why then they want it. On the other hand, Messrs. Webb & Cox are content<sup>4</sup> to say that it is absurd to suppose the miners would ask for an Eight Hours Law if they had already an Eight Hours Day. Both pairs of inquirers leave us to settle the problem for ourselves. According to Messrs. Hadfield & Gibbins, "nearly one-half" of the total number of miners have declared in favour of an Eight Hours Law, which only a few of them seem to need; while, as we have seen, the Trade Union Congresses are especially ready to support a Miners Act, in the teeth of the opposition of the other half of the miners.

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<sup>1</sup> Printed by Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield, p. 20.  
pp. 20, 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>3</sup> They apparently clash with those given by Messrs. Webb & Cox (p. 85); but the difference is one of day measurement and week totals.

<sup>4</sup> P. 86.

What, then, are the explanations? As regards the miners, two may be suggested. (1) An Eight Hours Law for all mine employees would probably mean *less than* eight hours from bank to bank for many of the hewers, inasmuch as their work depends on that of other hands, who at present often work ten or more hours when the hewers work eight or less. In that case an Eight Hours Law would be a means of restricting output, which is naturally the object of the miners generally, but which is almost inevitably a source of hardship to other industries; and as the miners' representatives who demand the law are steadfastly opposed to permitting double shifts, it would seem that this theory goes in the right direction. (2) On the other hand, it would seem that many miners want an Eight Hours Law by way of preventing the present *voluntary* irregularity of hours. The average number of working days varies from 5 to 5½ days, and it thus happens that miners in general spend several days of the week in idleness, working hard on the others to make up for lost time. The idleness is said to involve intemperance; and many are said to want either to force others, or to be themselves forced, to work a certain number of hours on each day, by making it impossible to exceed eight hours from bank to bank on any one day. Assuming either or both of these explanations to be valid, one can only say that they are rather far aside from the motives by which an Eight Hours Law for mines is popularly supposed to be justified. There is no need to take the invidious course of asking whether the mining industry is specially injurious to health; for it would seem that

an Eight Hours Law can make almost no difference in that regard save such as the men at present are free to make, unless the effect of the law is to be a reduction of the hewers' day to considerably *less* than eight hours.

As regards the view taken of the miners' case by the workers generally, again it would appear that small consideration has been given to the probable effects of an Eight Hours Law for mines on output and on the manufacturing industries. It would seem rather that the miners' case is taken as one particularly feasible for legislation, in view of the simplicity of its conditions. It may be also, indeed, that a powerful motive is a generous and disinterested sympathy, such as the workers generally are quick to feel, for the men of an industry which more often than any other, save the little-considered craft of the seafarers, has to record dreadful calamities, in which hundreds of men are destroyed at a blow. But the generosity and nobility of this feeling will not suffice to decide the matter for those of us who feel that half the miseries of life spring from action undertaken with motives either benevolent or genial.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE VARIOUS SCHEMES.

#### I.

IF the subject of an Eight Hours Law is to be thought out at all, it must evidently be dealt with, for one thing, as a question in economics.<sup>1</sup> It is indeed a double problem; and when it has been viewed on the side of economics it still falls to be studied carefully on the side of politics; but the economic inquiry is plainly indispensable to any rational and valid judgment on the matter. Unfortunately some of the workers, having given their voice for an Eight Hours Law as an apparently direct and simple way

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<sup>1</sup> Messrs. Webb & Cox have an unfortunate expression (p. 34): "Even the political economists were forced to recognise the growing *feeling* in favour of a limitation of the hours of labour"—as if either the economists were supposed slow to recognise a feeling when they saw it, or the feeling affected the economic question. If Messrs. Webb & Cox wish it to be understood that they are *not* economists, they might do well to say so plainly. They go on to speak of "the political economists" as coming to a particular conclusion when they have only recorded that one economist offered a "guarded opinion." This is certainly not the style in which political economists are expected to write.

of improving their position, are apt to accuse of hostility to labour anyone who undertakes the economic inquiry save by way of finding arguments on their side. This attitude is, of course, not peculiar to working-men in controversy, but in their case it is perhaps specially unfortunate, as it tends to deprive them in great measure of the benefit of friendly criticism, and to procure for them a superabundance of mere partisan support. They will always find politicians ready to chime in with them: they are not so sure of finding politicians who, while sincerely democratic, are yet prepared to argue against what they believe to be popular mistakes. When Mr. Bradlaugh first met the Eight Hours Movement with arguments to show that it was such a mistake, he was promptly met, not with counter argument, but with the charge that he was unfriendly in his treatment of popular aspirations—this after a life nearly worn out in unremunerative propaganda among and for the people. And this kind of tactic is resorted to by educated Socialists, who might have been expected to see the peculiar importance of independent judgment and criticism within the democratic party. Similarly, my friend Mr. G. B. Shaw, in his debate with Mr. G. W. Foote on the same question, said—probably without thought, but none the less objectionably—that “the opposition to the Eight Hours Bill is altogether due” to the self-interest of capitalism. Thus encouraged, by those who ought to be their scrupulous teachers, to throw mere angry taunts at whoever differs from them on policy, some workers are only too likely to disregard or condemn any fresh investi-

gation such as the present, and to accuse the writer of unfriendliness or Toryism. Such risks must be faced by somebody if the air of democratic politics is to be kept wholesome. I know one or two good economists, good Radicals—I must call them good—who, while convinced that an Eight Hours Law is unworkable, have thought it right to countenance the political movement as expressing a wholesome aspiration towards leisure. I cannot think this is how such men should act, and I must needs take another course. On a careful study of the arguments for a general Eight Hours Law—for this is what the agitation broadly calls for—I can discover little ground for believing that it is a wise project, and many grounds for apprehending that, if enacted, it will not only collapse, but give occasion to an injurious Conservative reaction, by destroying faith in progressive measures. My reasons for this view I will attempt to set forth.

## II.

At the very outset, the gravest reason for distrust is found in the extraordinary contradictoriness of the arguments by which the Eight Hours Law is advocated. It is hardly too much to say that almost no two writers who have argued for it are even substantially agreed on their reasons.

1. Messrs. Webb & Cox, of the Fabian Society, in their treatise entitled "The Eight Hours Day," state<sup>1</sup> that the rapid progress of the Eight Hours Move-

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<sup>1</sup> P. 22.



ment is "due largely to the energetic labours of Mr. Tom Mann." Now, the arguments of Mr. Tom Mann, however they may relate to those of Messrs. Webb & Cox, are in the strongest contradiction to those of their colleague, Mr. G. B. Shaw. Mr. Mann in his pamphlet<sup>1</sup> expressly contends that an Eight Hours Law will increase the income not only of the workers but of their employers :

"Improved methods of production have so increased the output, that the employers can pay a higher wage for fewer hours' work, sell the articles cheaper, and still obtain a larger income for themselves. There is no reason to doubt that similar results will follow a further reduction of hours."

What Mr. Mann so confidently declares there is no reason to doubt, Mr. G. B. Shaw not only doubts, but meets with the proposition that one of the main benefits of an Eight Hours Law will be to lessen the share of wealth going to the landlords and capitalists, and that only in this way can the worker gain in wages. Yet these gentlemen alike win votes for an Eight Hours Bill. And Mr. Mann specially complains<sup>2</sup> that "many Eight Hours advocates are doing the cause great harm" by not recognising that the proposed law will lessen instead of increasing the total cost of production.

2. This issue touches closely on the other as to whether in an Eight Hours Day the workers generally will produce per head as much as they did in a longer day. Mr. Mann appears to think they will not, since he says "a reduction of working hours lessens com-

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<sup>1</sup> P. 6.

<sup>2</sup> P. 10.

petition for employment," though he does not at all connect this view with his thesis that cost of production will lessen and profits increase. But other supporters of an Eight Hours Law expressly argue that in an Eight Hours day the workers in general, in the manufacturing industries, *will* produce as much per head as they do in a longer day. This was the emphatic contention of Mr. F. G. Jones, of the Social Democratic Federation, when he recently debated the question with me at Northampton. But Mr. Hyndman, of the same body, appears to hold otherwise; and Mr. G. B. Shaw, in his debate with Mr. Foote,<sup>1</sup> repeatedly declares that if the view specified should prove correct, he will at once commence an agitation for a Seven Hours Law.

3. The question of relative output, again, touches closely on that of deliberate restriction of output. All of the above-cited writers agree in desiring an increased output of articles of ordinary consumption; yet it is pretty clear that the miners, in so far as they demand an Eight Hours Law, do it with the hope of restricting the output of coal. Mr. W. Abraham, their Parliamentary spokesman, strongly resists the view that there should be more than one shift; and restriction of output is confessedly the aim of many of his followers. Yet the advocates of the Eight Hours Law generally incline to legislate first of all for the miners. It must be admitted that they show great good faith in incurring the risk of an industrial check as the first fruits of their measure.

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<sup>1</sup> Pp. 8, 20.

4. Yet again, while most of the advocates of an Eight Hours Law assume, with Mr. Shaw, that it will increase employment in industries in general, Mr. Shaw expressly contends that it will destroy a number of industries which minister to the rich, while Messrs. Webb & Cox anticipate that it will destroy several poor industries. Mr. Shaw specifies<sup>1</sup> among the industries which will be "deprived of their market" those which produce "carriages, yachts, plush, velveteen, and other luxuries of the rich;" and among the "other luxuries" we may presumably include high-class furniture, carpets, good houses, artistic metal-work, jewellery, good watches and clocks, pictures, and books which are not low priced. I shall deal later with the sociological or political side of Mr. Shaw's doctrine; but I wish to note here that his view is quite opposed to that of the workers in the industries specified, so far as these want an Eight Hours Day; and that he is really forecasting a process which would at once go far to nullify the extra demand for labour which, he says, an Eight Hours Law will produce, by throwing idle at the instant thousands of workers (not to mention the artists) who will have to compete for new employment at a disadvantage. At the same time, according to Messrs. Webb & Cox,<sup>2</sup> certain low-class industries will be destroyed by being made unprofitable—a view somewhat contrary to Mr. Shaw's general thesis, that the effect of the proposed law will be to raise wages without raising prices, by forcing investors to be content

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<sup>1</sup> Debate cited, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> P. 118.

with less interest, and landlords with less rents. It seems doubtful whether Mr. Shaw reflected long on the economic consequences of his hypothetical destruction of industries, whatever Messrs. Webb & Cox may have done.

5. In connection with this agitation, many Socialist writers are found asserting a general upward progress in the condition of the workers in modern times, as a specific result of the gradual reduction of the hours of labour. Yet when Mr. Bradlaugh used to allege such progress, he was vituperated as a Conservative by writers of the same party, they denying that there had been any. And while nearly all the Socialist speakers take the line of attributing good results to the past reductions in the hours of labour, Mr. Hyndman, in his debate with Mr. Bradlaugh on the Eight Hours Question, contended<sup>1</sup> that the physique of the workers has markedly declined in the last fifty years.

6. There is the great question of overtime. An Eight Hours Law, with permission of overtime, is simply a measure to control wages—a thing which, perhaps, no economist will defend. Yet it is certain that thousands of workmen desire an Eight Hours Law in order to make overtime pay begin sooner.

7. Some Socialist supporters of the movement avow that a measure of Protection will have to follow on an Eight Hours Law in order to save some industries from injury by foreign competition. But not a single leader of the movement professes to conceive of such a possibility, though there are many grounds for ex-

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<sup>1</sup> P. 8.

pecting that Protection will be demanded if an Eight Hours Law be passed.

8. Others protest that if the Eight Hours Law is to be worth anything it must be international; and some of these, holding this view, support the English movement, most of whose supporters do not trouble themselves about an international law.

9. Much stress is laid by many advocates of the Eight Hours Law, and latterly by Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield, on the fact that certain employers who have voluntarily adopted an Eight Hours Day in their works have found it to be profitable. It does not seem to occur to these reasoners that if it be really to the advantage of masters in general to run an Eight Hours Day, it must be utterly needless to pass a law on the subject. Laws to make employers put money in their pockets have not hitherto been held necessary in our polity. But the same reasoners are found in many cases (*e.g.*, Messrs. Webb & Cox) arguing that an Eight Hours Law will cause a fall in profits, and contending that masters ought to be forced to submit to loss in the interest of the community. Then it must be recognised by the writers that an Eight Hours Day is profitable only in a few special industries; and yet the experience of employers in these special industries is put forward as justifying a general law, or a law for other industries.

### III.

It is at least clear that a number of the foregoing mutually destructive arguments must be fallacious; and such a chaos of contradiction at least gives ground

for questioning whether the proposition they are employed to support has a valid argumentative basis. When the advocates of a measure are seen to be vigorously contradicting each other, they might surely admit that those who contradict them all have about as much chance of being right as they. If five doctors all pronounce for amputating a patient's limb, and all the while take five irreconcilable views of what the effects will be, a sixth doctor who proposes a different course is presumptively worth listening to. And this the more readily because there are many reasons for attributing other than scientific impulses to the others. After the imputations which have been thrown broadcast by the advocates of an Eight Hours Law, there need be no scruple about saying that many of them seem to have given their adhesion first and looked for their arguments after. The wish is too palpably father to the thought in their reasoning. In itself the wish may be not only harmless but creditable; but bad reasoning is entitled to no mercy when it is fallen into by writers who are ready to impute sinister feeling where they are at a loss to demonstrate fallacy.

Here, however, I may explain that I am not proposing an absolutely different course from that which is loosely specified in the phrase "an Eight Hours Law." An Eight Hours Law may be made (or sought to be made) general, or it may be particular. There may be an Eight Hours Law for public (State or municipal) employments alone. Many who oppose a universal Eight Hours Law are willing to have this. Mr. Bradlaugh was. He further admitted, as did Mr. Morley, that the railways, as being State monopolies,

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might justly be legislated for in the matter of the working hours of employees. This, we shall see, is what is finally contended for by writers who asperse these politicians as reactionary. For, even if the arguments in support of a general Eight Hours Law were consistent, which they are not, there is finally extreme conflict as to what the Eight Hours Law is actually to be. The Eight Hours Bills are as contradictory as the economic arguments for an Eight Hours Law. It is not a mere difference of machinery or policy aiming at the same end : it is a sharp opposition on the question of what is to be aimed at. The leading advocates of an Eight Hours Law neither propose the same law nor agree as to what the effects of any law would be.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE BEST ACCREDITED PLEA.

#### I.

AT the close of their elaborate work on "The Eight Hours Day," Messrs. Webb & Cox, after arguing throughout for the feasibility of a general Eight Hours Day, explicitly admit that a general Eight Hours Law is impossible. They propose only (*a*) the Permissive Bill of the Fabian Society, which would enable the majority in any occupation to call for an Eight Hours Law; and (*b*) the establishment of an Eight Hours Law in public employments, mines, and public monopolies, such as railways and gasworks. They say :<sup>1</sup>

"There are certain occupations in which the direct interference of Parliament is justifiable and desirable, in order to secure at once a maximum 48 hours week, accompanied with a maximum 10 or 12 hours day. These occupations are the following : all Government work, whether direct or by contract; all work in mines; all work on railways, tramways, gasworks, and other local monopolies. To refuse the Eight Hours Day in these cases, on the ground that it is inapplicable in other cases, is childish."

What is here termed childish appears to be the position of the popular Socialist party. Debating with

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<sup>1</sup> P. 237.



Mr. F. G. Jones at Northampton, I pointed to State employments and public monopolies as cases in the nature of which a restrictive law was economically workable; and Mr. Jones indignantly protested, amid applause, against legislating for a few privileged occupations. It was not, I think, that he and his friends saw the difficulty of enforcing such a law, a difficulty which I, for my part, had not then contemplated, but that they objected to benefiting any class of workers singly. Mr. Jones further referred somewhat derisively to the "philosophy" of Messrs. Webb & Cox. And yet these Fabians on the one hand, and the Social Democrats on the other, alike help to swell the cry for an Eight Hours Law, while thus utterly opposed as to what it shall mean, and to raise the popular hue-and-cry against all politicians who attempt to show what a confusion the Eight Hours Movement is. Mr. Webb, in his work of collaboration, as in his original essay,<sup>1</sup> ends by admitting that a general Eight Hours Law is impracticable. Such a conclusion to such a polemic as his is memorable. A book of nearly 300 close-printed pages is written ostensibly to justify the Eight Hours Movement; and it turns out that in the end it proposes a course which, as we have seen, will in no wise satisfy those who chiefly constitute that movement. Mr. Webb<sup>2</sup> is sensitive about the ungenerousness of pointing out to workingmen that they are mistaken; but he seems to have no misgiving about leading thousands of them to the bitterest disappointment.

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<sup>1</sup> In the "Contemporary Review," December, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> Article cited, p. 865.

## II.

It is not difficult to understand that even stronger feelings than derision may be felt for the position of the Fabian Society on the Eight Hours Question by those workers who have joined the general movement. The Fabians are about the only Socialists who have looked into the economics of the case, and they see the impossibility of the popular proposal. But they recognise that it is "a good cry," and they are concerned—at least some of them visibly are—to be popular somehow. They accordingly proceed to denounce those politicians who put forward criticisms which they cannot answer, while coinciding with those politicians as to their practical proposals, save in the single matter of their own Permissive Bill.

Of that measure it is somewhat difficult to take a serious view. It proposes that a bare majority in any occupation may call for a law fixing its maximum hours of labour at fifty-four or less (down to forty-five) per week. This is not an Eight Hours Day, to begin with. To secure this, it provides that a Secretary of State, when called upon by any trades union (or, in the case of trades without a union, a trades council or congress), shall "cause a public inquiry to be held in the principal district or districts in which such trade or occupation is carried on, *or* cause a poll to be taken of the persons employed in such trade or occupation, *or take such other means as he may deem fit.*" Thus the trade is not even to take its own poll; and the Secretary of State is allowed the most hand-

some latitude as to what he shall consider a sufficient pretext. Besides, a trades council may, if it pleases, demand a poll for an Eight Hours Day among journalists or domestic servants; and the Secretary of State shall thereupon be bound to set about it. Once passed, the law is not to be enforced until after three months; but from that date every employer contravening it shall be fined £10 or less for each contravention, the employee going scathless, even if he had desired to be employed as he was. And if it shall be found by the majority of the trade in question that the law they have obtained is injurious to them in any way, they shall not be at liberty to change it for a year,—unless they can persuade the Secretary of State to let them. For it is “provided that a Secretary of State shall not, *except for special reasons approved by him*, institute any such inquiry within a period of twelve months from the date of the holding of any previous inquiry in respect of the same trade or occupation.”

Whatever may be the position of the minority of workers whose hours and (by consequence) wages are thus settled for them, nobody will deny that the Secretary of State enjoys a wonderful amount of freedom in the discharge of his functions. If he finds he has erred in his poll-taking or “such other means” as he saw “fit,” he has only to get up a different statistic and declare that arrangement legal which the other day he pronounced illegal. He may even make and unmake his law before it is time to enforce it. If he finds that the law lowers wages to a serious extent, he may see “special reasons” to take a poll or “other means” to abrogate it within a month of its promul-

gation. Or, if he chooses to punish the trade for giving him so much trouble, he may force them to hold for a year by an arrangement which they very much want to repeal after a fortnight.

In ordinary course this pleasing scheme of legislation might be dismissed with the epithet above cited from Messrs. Webb & Cox. But it is important to notice that the framers of such an absurdity do not scruple to heap contumely on more judicious politicians who resist them, while they themselves pose as the representatives of the latest political science. Their own bill is probably the most irrational that has been framed since that of Lord Randolph Churchill for dealing with tradesmen's accounts. The alternative to their bill, that proposing a general Eight Hours Day in all occupations, they admit to be quite impracticable. But that alternative is the thing desired by most of the workers for whose support they are catering; and all the while the treatise of Messrs. Webb & Cox passes for an economic justification of a general measure.

### III.

What is mainly done in Messrs. Webb & Cox's treatise is (1) to dwell at great length on the evils of overwork, which nobody denies, and (2) to argue vaguely that an Eight Hours Law would not lower wages. With a good many readers, the just protests on the first head probably pass for arguments on the second. When, however, the arguments are analysed, it is found that they contain no economic reasoning

whatever to show that the enforcement of an Eight Hours Law would not lower wages either in those industries which have to meet foreign competition or in those which have not. On the contrary, in regard to the latter occupations, the evidence is the other way. I confess myself somewhat taken aback by the testimony candidly adduced as to the lowering of wages concurrently with a reduction of hours on the Huddersfield municipal tramways. Enthusiastic readers must have expected to be shown that the employment of extra men kept up wages by increasing the demand for labour. But Messrs. Webb & Cox produce<sup>1</sup> official testimony to the effect that whereas the Huddersfield drivers and conductors were respectively paid 32s. and 26s. per week on a working day of 12 hours (14 hours with meal intervals), they are paid for an Eight Hours Day only 26s. and 21s. respectively. Messrs. Webb & Cox state<sup>2</sup> that "the men usually seemed to prefer the shorter hours, even at the cost of lower wages; but there has not yet been time to see whether the fall in wages will be less temporary than that at Preston, on the passing of the Ten Hours Bill."

Here we have a fair sample of the way in which Messrs. Webb & Cox shelve the economic problem. They do not ask *how* it came about that there was first a fall and then a restoration of wages at Preston under the Ten Hours Law. In this connection they make<sup>3</sup> the statement that "the play of *economic forces*" brought about a rise after the fall. But what

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<sup>1</sup> P, 264.<sup>2</sup> P. 102.<sup>3</sup> P, 113,

forces? Not a hint is dropped. We are left to reflect that "argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life." If a thing happens it must have happened somehow. *Je vous apprends que votre fille est muette*. It would be hard to find in economic literature a more simple-minded evasion of a difficulty.

Need I urge that the inquiry really begins where Messrs. Webb & Cox have here left off? So much lies on the face of the case; and yet these gentlemen have produced the most copious and the most laborious of the treatises dealing with the Eight Hours problem. They have undertaken to provide a manual of fact and theory for the politicians and labour leaders who have to deal with the question; and it is evident that they have done this in a very disinterested spirit. Their only bias is the bias of sociological inclination, and their personal disinterestedness will win them the confidence of many. Yet their altruistic bias is quite as fatal in science as a mercenary one would have been, inasmuch as it is even more likely to blind and mislead. The result is that the whole theoretic ground must be worked over again, in the interests of pure science, if any of us there be who has these interests purely at heart. One can but essay.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PLAN OF PARTICULAR LEGISLATION : RAILWAYS AND MINES.

THE most considerate and comprehensive survey of the case made by advocates of an Eight Hours Law having ended in a suggestion that an Eight Hours Law should be made for particular industries, it will be well first to consider that proposal. It may be followed up from the starting-point of the data given as to the Huddersfield tramways, which, though unfavourable to, is not conclusive against, the plan of legislating for selected industries. A shortening of hours in one limited industry may easily bring such an influx of competing labour that wages may be considerably reduced; whereas a general shortening of hours in all railways, tramways, and gasworks at once, may not cause such reduction of wages, because the redundant labour supply may then be fully absorbed. And if I, for one, did not expect that it would be thus absorbed, I should be less ready than I am to vote for a legal restriction of hours in all public and monopoly occupations. It is a point for the men to consider. It is all very well for Messrs. Webb & Cox to say<sup>1</sup> that the Huddersfield men, who had previously been

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<sup>1</sup> P. 133.

paid more than the market rate, were satisfied to take a lower wage; but how would men stand in other places? I conversed lately with a London 'bus conductor as to his position before and after the late strike. The hours remain very long, but the wages are considerably higher; and he declared that he preferred the long hours with the better wages, because he could now maintain his family so much better. This brings us to the final economic probabilities. When all is said, even if a legal restriction of hours in all public and monopoly employments should serve to absorb for the time being the redundant labour in the market, there will probably be a tendency to a reduction of wages in the occupations so controlled, in so far as the advantage of shorter hours will attract a certain amount of labour thither by preference. But this preference will be partly dependent on the "play" of an "economic force" which is probably in operation at Huddersfield, namely, the capacity of the men to work at other occupations in their freed hours. And if this be so, the question arises whether the upshot of the restriction in the specified occupations will not be just to set up equalising readjustments throughout the labour world generally, so that the men with short hours in any one occupation not involving extra strain or skill will either have to live on low wages, or have to eke out their wages by other work in their off hours. The likelihood of such a result seems great, since already the process is seen at work in connection with the State shipbuilding yards. I learn from working-men at Portsmouth that in that town painters who work the (often) short day in the national yards



are known in the season to rise at three or four in the morning and do some hours' work for masters or other persons outside, before they begin their regular work ; while the carpenters are equally given to working for outsiders after dockyard hours. Here then are cases in which wage-earners are placed in a position of privilege by a short working day in the national workshops, only to turn this privilege to the account of competition with unprivileged workers in their off-time. The same thing would naturally arise under an Eight Hours Law for railway employees, whether skilled or unskilled ; the skilled men taking work to their homes, as in the case of carpenters, or going out to jobs, as in the case of painters, or to workshops, as in the case of mechanics ; and the unskilled competing with all sorts of unskilled or semi-skilled labour. When the unprivileged workmen complain that this is unfair to them, it is impossible to gainsay them. The fact that the majorities in the Congresses have not yet complained does not cancel the grievance of those who do. It would be necessary in justice, from their standpoint, to accompany an Eight Hours Law for railways with a provision that the railwaymen should not do any other work. But such a provision would be practically incapable of enforcement ; for, first, every employee would have to be "shadowed," and finally it would be impossible to settle what was and what was not a legitimate use of his leisure time. Would he be free to help friends who would otherwise have had to employ hired labour, or even to make for himself articles which otherwise he would have had to buy ? If the unprotected trades object, as already the outside

workers object at Portsmouth, to an unconditional protection for any sets of workers, such protection becomes impracticable. At Portsmouth the outside workers urge that in State workshops the hours and the wages alike should be those current in the same trades outside or in private dockyards. I can see no valid rebuttal.

The only sort of answer that can be offered to such a demand is that in the case of protected railwaymen the wages of the protected men will fall in natural course, so that they will really be no better off than the unprotected. But this reduces the Eight Hours Law to absurdity, inasmuch as it is admitted there will finally be no shortening of hours save in the case of men who cannot get the extra work they want, and have to live on less wages in consequence. Yet this is one of the cases specially selected by friends of legal restriction as a practicable opening.

The other favourite case—with many *the* favourite case—is that of the miners. It naturally seems less favourable to principled Radicals, because mines are not State-conferred monopolies, as railways and tramways and waterworks are. To interfere with mining hours is from this point of view the same thing as interfering with the hours of agricultural labourers or cutlers. Therefore the first thought of Radicals anxious to better the lot of the miners—my own first thought, I may say—is to nationalise the mines, and then fix for them such working hours as we see fit. In that case probably there would not arise the difficulty that we have seen arising in the dockyards, and sure to arise in the railways: at least it seems un-

likely that miners with an Eight Hours Day would want to compete with other labour in their leisure time, or would be able to do so to any serious extent.

But the more one considers the practical problem of mine nationalisation (in the sense of the State *working* the mines), the more clear does it become that the mining industry would be one of the very hardest to work on State lines. Railways, gasworks, waterworks, tramways — all these are much more practicable industries for nationalisation, because, like the Post-office, they render services which are in pretty equable demand, need be little affected by variations in prices, and exclude competition. But the moment we come to deal with the production of consumption goods, and especially consumption goods *for export*, we are in an insurmountable difficulty. A socialised State could, of course, manage its mines as easily as anything else; but a very partially socialised State like ours, with many competitive industries, could not manage them at all. It must either run them as they were run before, in which case (*a*) it would not be worth doing, and (*b*) workers and employers alike would be always protesting; or it must run them under fixed restrictions of output and export, which would derange all ordinary industrial operations. Mine nationalisation, then, in the sense of State management of mines, can only come late in the process of nationalisation (socialisation), and is for the present out of the question. The true course for Radicalism in regard to mines is the same as in regard to land, to wit, the nationalisation of the *economic rent*. That is to say, mining royal-

ties, which some miners ask to have abolished, should be taken over by the State. To "abolish" them would only be to put them in the pockets of all those mine lessees who work the mines above the lowest grade of workableness. And nationalisation of the economic rent of mines would leave the question of working hours as before.

An Eight Hours Law for mines, then, is to be contemplated in the existing industrial connections. Broadly speaking, the tendency is for miners' wages to fall to the point below which men cannot be got to work in mines; and the hardship of the life is thus one of the main causes why wages in it keep higher than in other occupations equally easy to learn. Assuming, then, that the majority of the miners now work over eight hours a day, an Eight Hours Law would (a) bring more labour to the mines seeking employment; and the natural effect of this extra competition could only be prevented by very active, not to say illegal, measures on the part of the unions. In that case, there would be no relief to labour in general, save in so far as (b) the restriction of hours made it necessary to employ more hands to keep up the output. But the increase of labour in mines being a matter of extension, not intension, either (a) the new hands would be set to work where just before no coal was being hewn, or (b) they would be employed in second shifts. In the first case, a rise in prices is clearly implied. If this rise is not maintained, the extra employment will cease. But equally the running of second shifts is compatible only with a rise in prices, unless there is a fall of wages; for

where 100 men formerly worked nine hours, and now work eight hours, there will be required a second shift of 12 or 13 men to make up the same quantity (assuming, that is, that miners get proportionally less coal in eight hours than in nine). If consumption remains the same, either the 112 men will get less wages per head, or prices will have to rise, in view of the normal relations between mine-masters and men. On the other hand, a rise of prices will check demand for coal unless there is some extra demand for manufactured goods. Then if there is not extra output with the old or lower prices and lower wages, there must be less employment. More employment will mean lower wages.

Thus, if an Eight Hours Law were really to lessen the average working hours in mines, the effect would be either to lower wages or to raise prices and lessen employment. Already the striking-power of the unions has got down profits as far as is feasible; and in point of fact the ideal of the men is to restrict output in order to raise prices and wages. There is no reason whatever to suppose that they would be content with less wages as the price of more leisure. They even expressly oppose the permission of double shifts, because that would tend to force increase of output and lowering of prices, and consequently of wages. They wish to keep up wages by restricting production. How then will the rest of the workers adjust themselves to this case? It is open to them, if they believe that miners are among the greatest sufferers from unhealthy toil, to agree to make an Eight Hours Law for mines, with single shifts, know-

ing that the effect will be raised prices for coal and metals. If the majority of the workers of all sorts really came to this decision, they could not be gain-said, for they would themselves have to bear the worst of the burden, in hardship of many kinds. They will have thrown some miners idle, to compete with themselves; and they will tend to lessen their own employment, by raising cost of production—unless they can somehow bring about increased consumption with raised prices. But is it likely that they will desire to do this? It would be strange if they did. They would be leaving the general labour trouble in a more acute stage than before; and it is the general labour trouble that has given breadth to the Eight Hours Movement. The irresistible presumption is that those non-miners who ask for an Eight Hours Law for mines, are doing so in the belief or hope that such a law will be followed by one for their own trades, or for some other trades. The Radical economist, then, as I see the matter, is not free to vote for an Eight Hours Law for mines, since by so doing (assuming the law to be workable) he would be helping either to disappoint the miners themselves or to inflict grievous hardships on the workers in general. We must seek a better way, capable of benefiting all alike.

There remains the possibility that the majority of the workers might decide to pass an Eight Hours Law for the monopoly industries, such as railways and tramways and waterworks, and for all State employments, in the knowledge that they would thus set up protection for the men of these industries as

against themselves. I confess I am ready to vote for the specific restriction if the majority of the workers wish it; because it seems well to make a beginning in the way of shorter hours where public responsibility rests directly on the electors, and where they have the clear moral right to set up legal restrictions. In public employments, they are the true employers; and where they grant monopolies, as in the case of railways and tramways, they have the right and the duty to specify the conditions of granting. I do not think, however, that they are likely to insist on an Eight Hours Law for the monopoly industries alone, or for all State employments. They would be creating a class of privileged workers. A Ten Hours Law for railways would be a more practical scheme, as securing some measure of protection for signalmen, guards, drivers, and others, who would not be at all likely to turn that amount of protection to the disadvantage of other workers. But even a Ten Hours Law, much more an Eight Hours Law, for railwaymen, might in time have the effect of lowering wages.

Thus already we find that the problem is far harder than the professed believers in the proposed legislation seem to realise; and that the solution will be a much more complex business than they suppose. The preferable solutions I have sought to set forth elsewhere, and shall briefly repeat later on; but first it will be necessary to point out how completely all the advocates of the Eight Hours Law have overlooked or ignored the most important "economic forces" in the matter as regards the other industries which would be affected by a general law.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PROJECT OF GENERAL LEGISLATION : THE MAIN ECONOMIC FORCE.

#### I.

THE Socialistic authors of "The Eight Hours Day," we have seen, end by declaring that a general Eight Hours Law is impossible. Nevertheless, multitudes of the workers are looking for a general Eight Hours Law, and their demand must be discussed. Indeed, it is open to them to argue that the collapse of the case for particular legislation, as it is set forth in the last chapter, is an argument for general legislation. The whole case must, therefore, be gone into ; and that is no easy matter.

The most judicial survey of the case for a law in restriction of working hours, so far as I know, is that of Professor Marshall. Unfortunately it is scanty and wanting in precision. It may be conveniently taken from the chapter which he entitles "The Influence of Progress on Value," in his late volume of "Elements of the Economics of Industry," which abridges the first volume of his "Principles." To Professor Marshall's treatment of the questions with which he deals under the very general head of "The Influence of Progress on Value," careful and thoughtful though



it is, I have first of all to object that it still has the shortcoming which made his earlier "Economics of Industry" in some respects so disappointing. It is his great merit to keep his economics directed towards sociology, and this in an increasing degree; but he always seems to me to come short of being sociologist enough. In the earlier book he in the most singular way avoided grappling with the population question, after virtually conceding its fundamental importance, passing it over with makeshift expressions which defied alike analysis and inference; and in the present work, though he does not do the same thing, he still fails to bring the law of population into radical connection with his social prescriptions; while in dealing with the practical problems of British industry he never seems to face the fact that that industry as a whole is, so to speak, a more eminently artificial system than any other. Much might be gained if such a candid reasoner would only draw back to a point of more general survey, and contemplate the forest instead of the trees. As it is, the value of his examination of the question of restriction of hours of labour is sadly curtailed by the fact that he never asks whether the English industrial system can in the nature of things be maintained on its present scale and footing for an indefinite time.

## II.

I have elsewhere<sup>1</sup> sought to show that, while the ordinary notion of the possibility of indefinitely adding

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<sup>1</sup> In "The Fallacy of Saving."

to national wealth by mere saving of money-credits is a hallucination, it does hold true that there is a gain to this country in so far as its accumulators of credit have lent their credits (transformed into British products) to foreign States, and are paid an annual dividend therefor in perpetuity. Such dividend necessarily comes in goods, which are necessarily cheapened to the consumer; and though our labour-power might conceivably produce so much more as to earn annually that extra amount of imports, as a matter of fact it is at present unearned, and really represents in a manner a return on investments paid to the entire nation—or at least to those who make demand for the products that the interest-paying States can give in meeting their liabilities. It follows, then, that if foreign States were so well governed that their populations did not have to pay annual tribute to aliens for borrowed capital, if all foreign national debts were rapidly paid off, and if in addition the extensive owning of lands by absentee Englishmen in America and our colonies were prevented, as is being done and will be done further; and if, finally, the draining of India were checked, as it eventually must be, it would be utterly impossible that our population should go on increasing as it has done and is at present doing, even if present inequalities of division of wealth could be rectified. Yet the economic prospects of the country are invariably discussed as if our enormous manufacturing system were a perfectly stable development. Temporary expansions, largely representing the exportation of lent-credit as goods, are regarded as processes of normal growth.

It is rarely asked, even by sociological economists, what will be the industrial outcome of the gradual exhaustion of our coal and iron supply, which has hitherto constituted our greatest manufacturing advantage as against other countries. It is hardly even considered whether our own National Debt, relatively a light burden so long as our profits were high, does not tend to be a more and more serious drag on competition with other industrial States. And sanguine Socialists, like Messrs. Webb & Cox, describe the "economic force" of foreign competition in the lump as a "bogie."<sup>1</sup> Whatever that means, it would seem to imply entire confidence in our capacity to maintain our industrial system on an increasing scale.

It is this optimistic presupposition, no doubt, that accounts for Messrs. Webb & Cox's contentment in citing figures as to the expansion of industry after former restrictions of hours of labour. We saw how pleasingly they explained that the rise of wages after a fall consequent on the Ten Hours Law was due to the "play of economic forces." Let us see for ourselves what these economic forces were, since Messrs. Webb & Cox seem unable to tell us. Professor Marshall saves us any great trouble by one paragraph of generalisation:<sup>2</sup>

"The rate of interest, which was vaguely reported to be 10 per cent. during a great part of the Middle Ages, had sunk to 3 per cent. in the earlier half of the eighteenth century; but the immense industrial and political demand for capital raised it again, and it was relatively high during the great war. It

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<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> "Elements," p. 353.

fell as soon as the political drain had ceased; but it rose again in the middle of this century, when railways and the development of the Western States of America and of Australia made a great new demand for capital. These new demands have not slackened; but the rate of interest is again falling fast, in consequence of the great recent accumulations of wealth in England, on the Continent, and above all in America."

I suppose Professor Marshall means that the demand for new "capital" in America tends to be increasingly met by American accumulations. In any case, it follows from his conspectus that there have been great variations in the relative foreign demand for British goods; because the lending of British credit-capital necessarily meant the extra exporting of British goods. Now, if the British population had not rapidly increased under the stimulus of that very demand for labour, it would not have suffered even from the inevitable check to the expansion of demand, inasmuch as the annual return of dividend in the shape of goods is a clear gain, albeit a morally unsatisfactory one. But the rapid increase of population did take place; and at the very time when sciologists were announcing that the Malthusian doctrine was exploded, its main law was in palpable operation. For among the "economic forces" whose "play" affected wages both before and after the passing of the Factory Laws, is one which is never even mentioned, so far as I have noted, in the whole 280 pages of Messrs. Webb & Cox's book,—to wit, EMIGRATION.

## III.

I will not go so far as to say that in the statistics of emigration we have the corollary of either the national output or what Professor Marshall calls the national dividend; but I do say that emigration is one of the main factors in the adjustment of labour demand and supply, and that it is monstrous that it should be left out of account as it is in every advocacy of an Eight Hours Law. Even Professor Marshall does not seem to deal with it in his discussion of the general question of labour restriction. Yet the factor of emigration is one of the main considerations in support of Professor Marshall's general protest against the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy in the discussion of restriction of labour hours. He turns this protest, as it happens,<sup>1</sup> solely against those who argue as to the tendency of labour restriction to cause trade depression. Now, as a matter of fact, the argument of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, "after this, therefore because of this," is hardly used in that connection at all; and there seems reason to suspect that Professor Marshall had begun to argue on one line and altered his mind and took another. It is the advocates of an Eight Hours Law who commonly argue that, since wages have risen after the Factory Laws, they have risen because of the Factory Laws. Their opponents argue for the most part deductively.

If I were to say, on the other hand, that emigration alone was the cause of rise or restoration of

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<sup>1</sup> P. 371.

wages, I should be ignoring the extensions of foreign demand for goods. But we shall include, I think, all the main economic forces of the case when we say that rise of wages with an increasing population is a function of increased demand, home or foreign, for labour, and that if emigration goes on alongside of a fluctuating process of advance in wages, the emigration is reasonably to be connected with the fluctuations. If, then, wages fall after a restriction of hours of labour, and rise later, the natural hypothesis is that either the fall caused emigration, or there chanced to be an increase in foreign demand. Now, as a matter of fact, the emigration from Britain, which was at the average rate of 28,000 per annum in the years 1815-34, rose to 113,00 per annum in the years 1835-50, and to 205,000 per annum in the years 1851-60. The matter is complicated by the fact that much of the emigration was Irish; so much, that out of 9,861,000 British emigrants in the 74 years from 1815 to 1888, the Irish numbered no fewer than 5,081,000. These are the figures of Mr. Mulhall. Kolb, again, divides the period so as to show an average emigration of 52,254 per year between 1815-46; 305,600 per year in 1847-54; and 160,128 per year in 1855-59. Either way, it is evident that there was a very high rate of emigration about the middle of the century; and even though it was largely of non-artisan Irish, that would mean a reduction in the British supply of unskilled labour which must have tended to relieve the higher labour market. All this on the one hand, and the special cause of industrial expansion on the other, Messrs. Webb & Cox ignore, in common with all other

supporters of the Eight Hours Law whose arguments I have met with.

Emigration, of course, goes on unceasingly ; and it may be argued that since that relief is always open, it is neither here nor there as regards an Eight Hours Law. But in the eight years 1881-88, the total British emigration has been 2,085,000, or an average of 261,000 per annum ; a great increase on the ten years 1871-80, when the total exodus was 1,678,000, or 168,000 per annum. In the decade 1861-70, the numbers were almost exactly the same. But for this recent extra emigration the labour market of late years must have been much more congested than it really has been ; and the pressure of need must have been great to cause such a movement, in the absence of special foreign inducements. Had most of the emigrants stayed, wages must needs have fallen in some employments, unless they had all been living at the subsistence margin, which we may safely assume was not the case. This being so, there is a plain presumption that the British proletariat is increasing at a rate far in excess of the normal opportunities of employment ; and that an attempt to relieve the market pressure by an Eight Hours Law, as regards the industries with foreign competitors, will either permanently lower wages or force increased emigration. And as forced emigration always means preliminary distress, we may take it that there must be a fall of wages before the relief takes place. If it does so take place, with a consequent restoration of wages, we shall be told that the Eight Hours Law has done all the good ; and the

distress and expatriation will be ignored. But it may be that the possibilities open to emigrants shall become so small that only extreme distress can force on the relief. Of this contingency not the least heed is taken—naturally so, when the very fact of emigration is ignored. The movement goes on blindfold, on the general assumption that things must come right somehow. It is imperative that economic investigation be made if we are to know what forces we are meddling with.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CLASSES OF INDUSTRY SEPARATELY CONSIDERED.

#### I.

PASSING from the general question and coming to the particular phases, we have to inquire how an Eight Hours Law will affect the different classes of industry, all round. For this inquiry they may be divided into three main sorts.

1. Industries which incur foreign competition.
2. Home distributive and other industries competing together.
3. Virtual monopolies, such as railways, some tramways, gasworks, etc.

It is in regard to the first class that most discussion has taken place ; but I do not find that the economics of the problem have yet been fully stated. We saw how opinion clashes among the advocates of the restrictive law ; and even the opinions cited do not represent the whole of the confusion ; for, as before mentioned, I find in some Socialist circles an opinion that an Eight Hours Law will so affect the competitive powers of certain of our industries that it must be followed by a strong measure of protection if these industries are to be saved. That this would

be so seems to me extremely probable ;<sup>1</sup> but the possibility has not once been contemplated by any of the writers I have cited, though it is insisted on by outsiders who are as zealous as they for the Eight Hours Law.

## II.

The first point to be considered is whether there would or would not be as much output per head in the manufacturing industries in an Eight Hours Day as in the longer days now worked. In the last section, I argued on the view that an Eight Hours Law is expected to cause extra demand for labour all round. We have seen that Mr. G. B. Shaw declares he will agitate for a Seven Hours Law if it be found that the output of an Eight Hours Day is as great as that of a longer day. It would not greatly matter if Mr. Shaw were so to agitate : I merely take the utterance as showing how the hopes of some run. On the other hand, however, we have seen that some Socialists believe there will on the whole be as much output per head in the shorter as in the longer day. This view is in many respects not ill-founded, having regard, not so much to the few voluntary experiments in special industries in which masters are said to have found that reduction of hours did not reduce output per head, as to the well-demonstrated possibility of making machinery do more and more work.

It seems clear that the case will stand differently in different industries. Messrs. Webb & Cox quote<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On this compare Professor Bastable, "The Commerce of Nations," p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix II.

the testimony of Burroughs, Welcome & Co., manufacturing chemists, who reduced their men's hours from nine to eight per day, with the result that the output was "nearly, if not quite, as great." But the firm go on to explain that they at the same time raised the wages, though at first "this was money out of pocket and a loss to us;" and they further introduced the system of profit-sharing. This then is not at all a test case. The men evidently have been led to work much harder, which brings us to the old question whether profit-sharing does not lead to general overstrain. Besides, the making of chemicals, to begin with, is recognised as a specially trying industry, hence the old hours had only been nine; and it may be that in such an industry eight hours is really about the limit of valid work, while in many other industries it would not be. One of the worst features of the Eight Hours Movement is that it takes no heed (*a*) of the very great differences in strain in different industries, and (*b*) of the possibility that *variations* of hours may in many cases be the most healthy arrangement.

Other testimonies cited by Messrs. Webb & Cox, and Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield, are equally inconclusive. A firm of manufacturers of alkali and soda, an industry which necessitates *continuous working*, employ men in shifts of eight hours, three shifts to the twenty-four hours. This is very easily understood: it is the most workable shift, save possibly one of six hours. A firm of type-founders, again—an industry in which the competition is not severe—have been able to reduce hours because of improvements in

machinery; and an engineering firm, strongly opposed to trade unions, have been able to give their men an Eight Hours Day, they say, because the men are not in the society of their trade. These employers find that by abolishing the breakfast-hour they get the men to work in better condition (having breakfasted before coming), and save the loss of work in slacking off and catching up again, and the loss of energy in walking to and from home for breakfast. This may well be, though it is not clear that the loss of two walks in the day is wholly a gain to the men's physique. But it does not follow that the same compensations would arise in all industries. In some the loss of working power at each break will be much less than in others. Besides, the gain from having breakfast before beginning work is not bound up with the Eight Hours Day, and presumably accrues already in some cases where a longer day is worked. A friend of my own, however, on proposing many years ago to shorten the working day by this means, was met by the obstinate opposition of his workers (women).

Other employers consulted by Messrs. Webb & Cox testify to complete failure, having found that with an Eight Hours Day they cannot meet competition. Mr. Mark Beaufoy, M.P., a manufacturer of vinegar, British wines, and jams, does indeed testify to success; but this again is a limited and peculiar industry, not subjected to foreign competition at all as regards the "British wines," and very little as regards the jams; and the former system of breaks in the working day had been very uneconomical.

One of the explanations given where success has

been attained, is that the men become more intelligent and efficient from increased leisure ; and this is obviously reasonable as regards specially skilled and delicate industries such as the making of chemicals, drugs, beverages, etc., where, besides, much depends on conditions of atmosphere. But it does not at all follow that there would be similar gain in more mechanical industries, where ventilation may be equalised and workrooms kept uniformly healthy. In many cases a day's work is determined by the length of time that men can work up to a machine going regularly.

And yet again, I have before me the detailed testimony of a firm of chemical manufacturers who tried the Eight Hours Day, and for a time made it pay, though at increased cost of production, because of good trade, but later were unable to give their men wages enough to live on in comfort on the short-day system. The facts must be taken together. If some masters can make an Eight Hours Day profitable, so much the better : may they have many imitators. But it has never been found that employers needed much pushing to do what it would pay them to do ; and it stands to reason that those who will not try an Eight Hours Day have, as a rule, no prospect of making it pay.

### III.

We have, then, very little reason to suppose that shortening of hours to eight would yield in general the same output per worker, while machinery and processes remain the same. Experience of the main-

tenance of output when hours are reduced from, say, twelve to ten, is clearly no argument. It is quite conceivable that an average worker may do as much in ten hours as in twelve; but he may not at all be able to do as much in eight hours as in nine or ten. It stands to reason that as we come nearer the mean capacity, the gain from reduction becomes more and more problematical. I am speaking, of course, not of the intellectual gain from leisure, as to which I am thoroughly in accord with the warmest advocates of the Eight Hours Law, but simply as to the economic question of output.

We are thus driven back to the conclusion that if output were to be maintained per head under an Eight Hours Law, it would be in the main by reason of the forcing-on of improvements in machinery. But such forced improvements can never be instantaneously carried out; and when they are resorted to it is, broadly speaking, because employers find it more and more difficult to compete profitably with their rivals, at home and abroad, or to produce goods cheaply enough to cause increasing demand. In the case of an Eight Hours Law being established, such difficulty must at once be extensively experienced, since the output per head would (as we have seen) be lessened. It is thus an open question whether there would even be extra demand for labour in the manufacturing industries, since manufacturers would be slow to take on extra hands to make goods which they had only a doubtful prospect of selling. Many, probably, would at once set about improving their machinery, with the object of employing fewer hands. This course is even

contemplated by some defenders of the Eight Hours Movement, looking only to the improvement in machinery as helping output, without any thought of the displacement of hands. In the one case, men are thrown idle; in the other, prices rise. And whereas demand might increase for ordinary consumption goods, in respect of purchasing power given to unskilled labourers formerly unemployed or ill-employed, but now taken into employment in the railways, etc., it would not increase for "higher class" goods, in the trades producing which there would therefore be depression.

Nay, we have seen one Socialist, Mr. Shaw, reckoning on the destruction of a number of these trades.<sup>1</sup> He appears to suppose that their hands may be easily drafted off to the production of goods in ordinary demand, and that there is no limit to the possibility of employing labour profitably (that is, competitively) in the production of such goods. This is a grievous hallucination. Machinery even now is always tending to outrun the demand for common goods, and the transference to them (were it practicable) of the new labour anticipated by Mr. Shaw would very speedily bring about over-production. It is only by raising the functions of the labour whose products are demanded—by rising from easily-made goods to artistic goods—that over-production can be perpetually avoided. And the only way to meet effectually and promptly the present congestion of the labour market, I once

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor Bastable as cited; and Messrs. Webb & Cox, who (p. 119) are prepared to see some sweated trades killed out.

more submit, is to set *new tasks* to labour by undertaking the reconstruction of cities, scientific sewage, and analogous works, while at the same time guarding against a return of the old trouble by inculcating all round prudence in procreation, and taking means to encourage the heightening of the standards of consumption by providing systematically for old age. The notion that an ever-increasing proletariat can be employed in perpetuity in producing only the simplest goods and rendering the simplest services, is really a return to the sentimental empiricism of last century, which proposed to abolish luxury instead of diffusing it.<sup>1</sup> It is even a worse fallacy; for in our day a large proportion of the workers are employed in making (*a*) articles of luxury, and (*b*) goods for export which must needs buy foreign articles of luxury, since they more than equate with the import of simple necessities.

Such fallacies can only subsist while men refuse to look at the industrial problem in the mass and in relation to fundamental laws. Last century English reformers ignored the problem of population because it had not sufficiently been forced on their notice. In this century they mostly have set it aside because of the great expansions of industry which have from time to time absorbed the superfluity of raw labour power—though all the while over-population was

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Wallace's "Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind" (Edinburgh, 1753) and Hall's "Effects of Civilisation on the People," 1805, both so able books in their way—or, at least, the latter—that my phrase "sentimental empiricism" may seem a hard saying.



painfully apparent to the observing eye. They continue to reason on the assumption that such expansions of industry are endless, and this in the face of the fact that not only American but European resources are being increasingly availed of, that we are losing our start, that a hundred forms of production formerly special to us are arising elsewhere, that we are meeting more and more foreign competition not only abroad but at home, and that those extensive borrowings of our capital by foreign States, which meant extra export of our goods and the return of an annual surplus of foreign goods, represent a very peculiar and transient phase of political development. The very spirit which makes an Eight Hours Movement must tend to mean the disappearance of National Debts—unless all goes ill.

#### IV.

Mere restriction of hours, then, in industries subject to foreign competition, will tend first to create trade depression by raising prices, and next to limit employment by forcing on a more rapid improvement of machinery. This conclusion can only be resisted, I believe, on one of two lines, namely, (1) the denial that foreign competition is to be feared, even when our workers further restrict their hours; (2) the contention that it is not prices that will rise but profits that will fall.

The second thesis, with which I shall deal first, is maintained by Mr. G. B. Shaw in his debate with Mr. G. W. Foote. I quote his own words:

“One of the immediate effects [of the proposed law] undoubtedly will be that the Eight Hours Bill will be made an excuse for running up prices in all directions. You will find that the persons who sell coals to you in the streets will immediately increase the price, and lay the blame on the Eight Hours Bill, just as they do now whenever there is a strike, or even a threat of a strike, among the colliers. But when they try on those tricks now they very soon have to come down again. When they raise the price of the hundredweight of coals, they find that people buy less coal. Thus the profits grasped at by increasing the price, disappear by the reduction of the quantity sold ; and the coal merchants can only bring back the sale to its former extent by bringing down the price to its former level. That is exactly how the employer will be checked if he attempts to raise the price of his commodities after the Eight Hours Bill becomes law. He may try it on—very likely he will ; but in the long-run he will find that the same laws of supply and demand which regulate prices at present will regulate them then, and that if he wants to get the same volume of trade—and it will be necessary for him to get the same volume of trade, and even a greater, as I shall try to show—he must keep the price at about its present figure. . . . Here is the employer, who must get the same amount of commodity produced, and who can only get the same price for it as before. . . . Therefore the employer is in this dilemma : he finds that he has to take on more men than before, for about the same product. What is the result ? He finds that he has less money than before to divide up between himself, the landlord, and the capitalist.”<sup>1</sup>

It is reasonable to make some allowance for the laxities of oral debate, in which there is a great temptation to the speakers to argue exaggeratedly ; but there seems no reason to suppose from the variations of language in the foregoing passage (such as substituting “very likely” for “undoubtedly” in re-

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<sup>1</sup> Debate cited, pp. 7, 8.

stating a proposition) that the speaker will not deliberately stand to his main thesis. He returns to the point,<sup>1</sup> and argues not only that it is possible to put the increased cost of labour on rent, but that it is possible through successive restrictions ultimately to "squeeze the landlord out altogether," by making the payment of rent out of profits impossible; and furthermore to "squeeze the capitalist out altogether." He proceeds yet further to allege that the same policy may squeeze the employer out, ("supposing you could do without him"); but we have perhaps enough to discuss without contemplating that contingency. Mr. Shaw has committed himself to these three propositions: (1) that prices of articles of which the supply is extensible can never be raised; (2) that rent can be made to disappear by restricting working hours, and so increasing cost of production; (3) that money-capitalists can be got to lend money-credit at a risk for no interest; and that thus they cease to be capitalists.

This is perhaps the worst extravagance of economic fallacy that has arisen in the discussion of the subject; and yet Mr. Shaw is not only an intelligent economist, but one who had seemed specially awake to the importance of the law of rent, which he has repeatedly forced on the attention of Socialists and Anarchists who ignore or misconceive it. I can only explain his present development as an example of what men can come to in argument when they want very much to prove that what they wish to happen must happen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pp. 10, 11, 31.

It seems necessary, however, to expose the three delusions in detail.

1. The argument as to coal is astonishingly lax—lax not merely in expression, as oral argument may be expected to be, but lax in conception. Mr. Shaw argues as if, in the case of a coal strike, prices must begin to fall towards their old level the instant there is slackening of demand. There is no such necessity, either in theory or in practice. Mr. Shaw does not seem to realise that the men often hope to raise prices by restricting output. While the strike continues, prices simply cannot return to their normal level, unless more coal is imported. The adjustment of price will be as between the restricted number of buyers who either are very loth to consume less or *must* consume as before, and the dealers. During a strike, dealers will as a matter of course try to hold on. When the strike is over, if wages have been increased or output lessened, there is not the least likelihood that prices will resume their former level. They will almost certainly stand at a rise. Only special circumstances can prevent their so standing, such as abnormal stress of competition among dealers, or continued restriction of consumption. After a time, coal prices *may* gradually sink all round, but this can only be in terms of a *general* lowering of profits in which coal dealers, like others, must participate. And this general lowering of the profits of capital still tends to be relieved by the resort of capital to other countries, just as the tendency of wages to sink is relieved by emigration; and it is further relieved by waste of credit-capital in bad enterprises. And the two relief tendencies are

correlative. While profits are tending to sink through capitalist competition, wages are tending to sink by the multiplication of the proletariat; and unless an Eight Hours Law is very promptly followed by increased emigration (which implies multiplied hardship as motive power) it will mean either raised prices or lowered money wages.

Save for the difficulty of foreign competition in the first of the three classes of industries before mentioned, raised prices may conceivably co-exist for a time with maintained or raised wages; and this might conceivably be the expectation of the supporters of the Eight Hours Movement. It might be argued that the raised wages would compensate the workers for the raised prices; and that the raised prices would be a just tax on the non-workers. High wages and high prices are the ideal of the workers in the United States, and of the coal-workers here. But while the coal-workers certainly want to restrict output and so raise coal prices, it is noteworthy that save as regards a few articles, or a few trades, the advocates of an Eight Hours Law profess to be convinced, like Mr. Shaw, that prices will not be raised. And this attitude may be taken to imply the perception, by those who take up Mr. Shaw's ground, that raised prices would mean loss of market through foreign competition, either at home or abroad, or in both cases; and the further perception, by those who predict an unreduced output per head, that unless there be maintenance of output the law will be a failure.

Whether wages and prices rise together or not, it is unlikely that ground rents will fall; but it is simple

nonsense to argue, as Mr. Shaw does, that rents will fall while the employment for labour is greatly increasing. One of the first effects of such increase would be to cause immigration;<sup>1</sup> and between this and the demand for better houses among the better-employed generally, rents in towns must necessarily rise instead of falling. The manufacturer therefore will be unable to throw his loss on the landlord: in fact, if he is able to employ more labour, he is likely to have to extend his factory, and so will contribute directly to the raising of rents. Factory rents are determined by the demand for building sites generally, and a landlord will not take less rent for a factory when the site is coming to be worth more for houses. The manufacturer must stay, with the prospect of paying *still more* rent, or else he must move to a cheaper suburban site, thus putting new expense on his workers—or, finally, he can stop business, thus throwing his men idle. *Then*, perhaps, rents would fall; but the loss had first of all fallen not on rents but on wages. And if landlords *were* to reduce factory rents for no economic reason, there would still be the house rents paid by the workers themselves. In fine, Mr. Shaw's notion of "squeezing out" the landlord by the simple process of successive restrictions of

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<sup>1</sup> Of course laws may be made to restrict immigration; but it does not seem to have occurred to a single literary advocate of the Eight Hours Law to stipulate for such contingent laws. Some of the labour leaders, I understand, propose to restrict immigration; but they are not at all facing the problem of emigration. If we restrict immigration, we shall be lucky if we are free to send out as many emigrants as we please.

labour hours, is the most gratuitous hallucination that has appeared in recent economics; and it is the more astonishing in view of his previous writings on economic rent.

3. While interest is on the whole gradually sinking, we are a very long way from the state of things in which interest will be at zero. And at that point, if ever it be reached, the capitalist will hardly lend his money to a manufacturer who stands a fair chance of losing it, even if he has to pay a banker in order to have it taken care of. But if he did, he would still be a capitalist. Barring other social changes, men would still save for future consumption, and for their own advantage in commerce.

## V.

In connection with the foregoing issues, however, we have still to consider the possible effect on wages of an increased demand for labour in the non-competitive or monopoly employments, such as railways, tramways, and gasworks, by reason either of an Eight Hours Law in these occupations, or of a General Law. Even in such occupations themselves, it should be noted, the increased employment would not be in the direct ratio of curtailment of hours; for not only would such labourers as dockers, as Professor Marshall points out,<sup>1</sup> be able to do more work in a shorter day if better fed, but such labourers as railway shunters, as Messrs. Webb & Cox point out,<sup>2</sup> actually work much

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<sup>1</sup> "Elements," p. 365.

<sup>2</sup> Work cited, p. 103.

better in the earlier than in the later part of their long day. Still, an Eight Hours Law in these employments must cause some considerable increase of demand for labour, presumably with higher wages; and such increase must tend to affect other occupations, whether or not these are subject to legal restrictions also. Professor Marshall remarks<sup>1</sup> that the lowest grade of workers are the "one class" "whose wages might be raised considerably *at the expense of other classes* by a mere diminution in the supply of their labour;" but I for my part am not prepared to make the assumption here implied, that the wages of low-grade workers can only be increased at the expense of other wage-earners. I will rather assume that their scarcity will improve the position of labour generally.

We have already considered the effects of a law applying to the competitive industries; but there now arises the question of the effects on them of a law affecting only the monopoly occupations. By calling off from the competitive industries some of the less skilled labour of these, it would lower the total supply relatively to the demand, and wages would tend to rise. Then would arise the former problem: Would prices rise, or would they not? On the lines of reasoning formerly laid down—always excluding the factor of foreign competition—prices would rise; but it would not follow that they would rise so much as to counter-balance the gain in wages all round. If they did not, there would be gain all round; and while rising prices

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<sup>1</sup> As cited, p. 366.



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held, the workers in the competitive trades might even successfully demand shorter hours, despite the presumptively increased demand for products, as manufacturers might run double shifts. But there is the old *per contra*. On the one hand there is the obstacle to rising prices presented by foreign competition; on the other hand there is the instant multiplication of the workers by immigration (often the return of emigrants) when labour is in high demand. The running of double shifts, too, would soon put supply ahead of demand in many industries; and all the while there is the continuous tendency of new machinery to evict hands. Thus we come back once more to the fundamental difficulty—the rapid increase of population. Unless that is checked, no restriction of hours of labour can be more than a momentary relief; and even with a partially restrained birth-rate and restrained immigration, while the standards of living would certainly be raised for the workers, other measures, and new forms of consumption, would be needed to prevent the chronic congestion of the labour market, relatively to the raised standards, by reason of the tendency of machinery to replace hands in manufacture.

## CHAPTER IX.

### INDUSTRIES SEPARATELY CONSIDERED : FOREIGN COMPETITION.

#### I.

WE now come to the case of those who may deny that foreign competition is to be feared as an obstacle to raised prices; though as none of the before-cited advocates of an Eight Hours Law appear to admit or suppose that there can be a rise in prices, it is not necessary to examine the point as against them. Excepting in the cases in which they are Protectionists, and agitate for new duties, they either hope that foreign competition will prevent prices from rising, or assume that under restriction of hours there will be as much output per head as at present, and accordingly no need either to raise prices or to lower wages. The latter view we have already considered. On the other hand, the view that foreign competition will prevent a rise of prices in the industries concerned involves the contention that the extra cost of production resulting from an Eight Hours Law will cut down profits. The question thus comes to be whether in general those industries subject to foreign competition can be carried on at all for much less profit than at present —

whether a restriction of hours in many cases would not mean a collapse of such industries.

A great deal of what is said on behalf of an Eight Hours Law appears to proceed on the assumption that manufacturing profits in general are so large that if divided among the workers they would constitute a great rise in wages. This appears, on inquiry, to be a serious misconception. I am not aware that any trustworthy analysis has yet been made of the sources of income of the upper and middle classes generally; but there is much evidence going to show that manufacturing profits are far from being so large a source as is commonly assumed by Socialists. Rent, interest on loans and home and foreign national and municipal debts, dividends of railway, banking, gas, and insurance companies, constitute an immense number of incomes apart from direct profit-earning. In some industries competition cuts down manufacturing profits so much that production is at times carried on at a sacrifice of share capital which an individual manufacturer would consider preventive of working. Mr. Bradlaugh, in his debate with Mr. Hyndman, pointed to the case of the Limited Liability Mills in Oldham, in which, in the five years to the end of 1889, share and loan capital amounting to £6,750,000 was found to have paid all over a little less than  $3\frac{3}{4}$  per cent.<sup>1</sup> Profits like these, though large in mass, clearly do not constitute a "wage

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<sup>1</sup> The profits in these mills in 1891 are stated by Mr. Samuel Smith at about  $\frac{1}{4}$  per cent. The same writer, in a published letter to Mr. Hugh Price Hughes, states his own average return on his investments in cotton-spinning at 3 or  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.

fund" on which workers can count to any serious extent. Advocates of an Eight Hours Law forget, again, that as things go at present there are many strikes in which employers close their works for many weeks on end rather than consent to raise wages as asked. The economic meaning of this is clear. A master here and there may "cut off his nose to spite his face," but masters in general will not forego opportunities of making profit. An unsuccessful strike is a virtual proof that in that case it pays employers better to close their works than to produce at raised cost. And this is so for two main reasons: (1) supply of machine-made goods tends easily to outrun demand; and (2) such goods are in general made for markets, home and foreign, in which foreign competition is felt in varying degrees.

By many people it does not seem to be realised that an immense amount of British-made goods is made for foreign consumption. Mr. Jones of the Social Democratic Federation, in debating with me at Northampton, expressly argued that the home market is much more important than the foreign. But even if the total home demand be greater than the foreign, the continuation of the foreign demand makes all the difference between going trade and ruinous collapse for our industries generally. Now, foreign competition in foreign countries tends naturally to become more and more energetic. Even if it be true that English workmen have some advantage over many others in respect of a greater energy, the result of climate and a meat diet, none the less foreign work in the mass tends to catch us up. We had primordial

advantages in our closeness to coal and iron supplies ; but other countries have such supplies, and are more and more utilising them ; and, besides, the cheapening of transport takes away from our manufacturing advantage. American competition grows more and more efficient, largely by reason of greater use of machinery ; protective tariffs disadvantage us as sellers in many markets ; and some of our industries, as, for instance, the flax-spinning industry in the Leeds district, which once employed some 15,000 hands, have actually been extinguished by foreign competition,<sup>1</sup> which produces better goods than ours at lower prices.<sup>2</sup> It is of no avail to argue, as do Messrs. Webb & Cox,<sup>3</sup> that since we must always produce some things more cheaply than others, it does not matter if we are undersold for certain of our own products in our own markets, and that an Eight Hours Law would not alter the economic law of the development of the industries which are relatively most advantageous. Much depends, to begin with, on the nature of the things in which our superiority is greatest. If these things be in large measure coal and iron, it is plainly only a question of time till we are at the end of our tether. And the old argument about the Bermudas importing potatoes when they themselves grow better ones, in order to concentrate themselves on the production of the best, will not solve the problem of a country with

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<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Bradlaugh's "Labour and Law," p. 46. Cp. Messrs. Webb & Cox, p. 106, *note*.

<sup>2</sup> I have seen and compared some of the goods, and can testify.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 116, 117.

*an ever-increasing proletariat*, especially when other countries are altering the conditions by protective tariffs, which systematically develop industries where under Free Trade they would be at a disadvantage.

In fine, it is not possible for any country to have in perpetuity a *general* advantage over other countries in trade; and if our wits were only ethically sharpened we should see that our selfish hopes on that head are vain. Nor is it, on the other hand, possible for a population increasing as ours does to count on finding undiminished employment in those industries which have a relative advantage over others. Labour is only with much friction and hardship transferable from one to another type of industry; and the decline of any one under foreign competition is only a hastening of that hardship which, as before observed, is always tending to arise from the displacement of labour by machinery. Suppose that one of our relatively advantageous industries be steel-making. Under the operation of the economic law under notice, we shall export more steel while exporting less of the things in which our natural advantages are relatively less. But exporting more steel does not mean employing proportionally more hands in that trade. Always we come back to that fundamental difficulty.

## II.

It must have struck many students of late years that, while one of the axioms of Free Trade is the necessary mutuality of gain among exchanging nations, English economists appear mostly to reckon

upon and prescribe for a superior advantage to England, whether other nations trade freely or not. Again and again an optimistic argument is wrought out as to what happens to us in trading with foreigners, without any apparent perception that the argument, if sound, should suit the foreigners just as well in regard to us. Very few even among Free Traders seem to act faithfully upon the maxim of Dudley North: "That the whole world as to trade is but one nation or people, and therein nations are as persons." Much light might be thrown upon the present discussion if we went back to the old illustration of Cobden and Bastiat, and asked how an Eight Hours Law would work if tried in Lancashire as against Yorkshire. If Lancashire durst not try any such thing in the present state of industry, why should all Britain be asked to try it as against other peoples? If we are to experiment, as some of the neo-Liberals propose, why not do it with our own counties? The only answer I can see is that one county with a time law in a free-trading country cannot compete successfully with another that has no time law, but that a free-trading country as a whole may so succeed against protectionist countries.

Perhaps the problem may be brought home to open-minded readers by raising the question put by Mr. J. A. Hobson in his very suggestive paper, "Can England Keep her Trade?"<sup>1</sup>

"May we not expect the same rapid rise and fall of the commercial importance of countries which we have seen in the

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<sup>1</sup> "National Review," March, 1891, p. 4.

counties of England? Is it absurd to suppose that England herself may sink, like Norfolk or Huntingdon, before the power of some vast new Lancashire? Is it so grossly improbable that India might become the Lancashire of the British Empire, or even, perhaps, will China become the workshop of the world?"

It may be answered that India and China will never yield so much human energy as Britain can, man for man; but then, if these climates can sustain life *very* much cheaper than ours can, our greater energy, as Mr. Hobson points out, may not be proportionally cheaper; and in that case, on the principle of "differential advantage," industry will grow where the fundamental natural advantage is greatest. It is strange that just when the need for controlling and resisting natural tendency is beginning to be so widely felt, Socialist economists, who recognise it in one direction, should in another rest everything on the beneficence of natural adjustments.

### III.

The optimist theory as to foreign trade, however, is so tenaciously held by many Economists, who, to my thinking, overlook one half of the industrial case in reasoning on the other, that it is necessary to analyse it further. Men who are not at all in favour of an Eight Hours Law are still of opinion that such a law "would not affect our foreign trade." When in a discussion I pointed out that in Messrs. Webb & Cox's argument (that the differential advantage of certain trades must remain under a general law) we might establish a *One Hour Day* without



affecting our foreign trade, an able economist, not an Eight Hours partisan, answered that a One Hour Day would *not* affect our foreign trade. This, I take it, must mean one of, or a combination of, two economic propositions: either (*a*) that since exchange must go on, other nations offering to sell to us, and our goods being our only means of buying, the industries with differential advantages would absorb from the others all the necessary labour and go on as before; or (*b*) that even a considerable restriction in the output of our exporting industries would only raise the price of the exports to foreign buyers, who would get less of our goods in return for theirs. Or it may be meant that both things may happen concurrently.

The former is the theory that seems to arise out of the old Free Trade doctrine, usually set forth by James Mill's illustration about England trading in corn and cloth with Poland, or that of the Bermuda (or other) Islands, which could raise potatoes for themselves more cheaply than they import them from the United States, but which prefer, nevertheless, to raise only that produce on which they make the greatest profit of all. This still passes for orthodox doctrine; and that it should do so is a striking proof of the strength of the tendency among the older economists, and disciples of theirs like Mr. Webb, to reason on industrial facts *in vacuo*. Obviously the action of the Bermudese, in the case put, depends upon the possibility of applying the bulk of the Bermuda soil *and of Bermuda labour* (unless there, too, there is an unsolved labour problem) to one species of culture;

and it does not at all follow that every community or country can in the same way concentrate all its strength on one species of industry.

Suppose the most advantageous forms of English production be those of coal-raising, and iron-smelting, and steel-making, and weaving, and cutlery, and that, in the words of Mr. Webb,<sup>1</sup> "We weave our wheat on Rochdale looms, grind our meat on Sheffield stones, and hew our wool in Durham coal-pits." That does not alter the fact that there remain other natural resources in England which it is much easier to utilise than it would be to turn ever more and more men to mining and grinding and weaving and smelting. The ideal Free Trade England (which is apparently also the ideal Fabian England), on the old theoretic lines, would be one wholly given over to the "favoured" industries, with its country districts turned to wildernesses; just as the ideal Canada on the same principles would be one wholly given up to wheat-growing and timber-growing. It is the sociological barrenness of this ideal that gives the Canadians their best pretext for going to the other extreme in their protective policy. But in any event the principle of population would overthrow the fanatical ideal, as it overthrows better ones. It is impossible to find room for ever-increasing numbers in the "favoured" industries alone; and the increasing swarm must take to the marginal industries, whether under Free Trade or under Protection. But under Free Trade, all buying as cheaply as possible, a slight difference of advantage

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<sup>1</sup> P. 116.

will serve to destroy an entire industry—as for instance, the flax-spinning industry of Leeds, which has been beaten by Bavarian and other foreign competition, because the foreign competitors are nearer the best flax, or put in better machines, or get their labour cheaper, or for all or some of these reasons together.

Does it then follow that all the *labour* that was employed in the beaten industry goes to the “favoured” industries which supply the exports that pay for the extra flax and goods we now import? Not at all. Where we now import flax goods, there will, no doubt, be extra demand for some of our other export goods; but for the extra quantity of these there will not be an absorption of labour to the extent of the labour displaced. In the terms of the case, the exporting industry is one of those with a differential advantage, that is to say, labour in that industry produces proportionally greater results than in the beaten one. Then, even if there be no improvement forced on in its machinery as a result of the raised demand, it will absorb less labour than has been displaced. But as the displaced labour, to a large extent, by reason of its nature, *cannot* be instantly turned to the favoured industry, the tendency in the latter will be to improve machinery, thus leaving still less opening for the displaced labour, supposing it to be ultimately or gradually adaptable. Meanwhile, the displaced labourers must greatly restrict their consumption, which means that there is less demand for certain goods of both foreign and home production; and less demand for foreign goods will tend to mean lessened

demand for home-made goods. Finally, whereas formerly we *exported* some flax goods, and in return received certain imports, these imports will not now come, and the kinds of articles in question will to that extent be dearer. Thus the chain of trouble completes itself, and even the volume of our trade is diminished.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV.

And all this is really implied in the statement of Messrs. Webb & Cox,<sup>2</sup> that certain "sweating" industries will be snuffed out by an Eight Hours Law. They quote an "experienced philanthropist"<sup>3</sup> as saying, "I would pay a heavy price to extinguish these sweated East End industries, *at whatever temporary risk to the workers in them.*" They had previously declared<sup>4</sup> that "philanthropists have no right to inflict suffering on one section of the community in order to heal the ills of another;" but they appear to think

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<sup>1</sup> After jeering, as before noted, at "the political economists," Messrs. Webb & Cox attempt to prove, by merely alleging "the unanimous judgment of economists" (p. 117), the proposition that "the total export trade could not be affected" by an Eight Hours Law, "and that any variation arising would be merely an alteration in the proportion in which the aggregate of exports was made up." Thus they condemn "the economists," or swear by them, as it suits their argument. But they do not prove even the alleged unanimity when they merely cite the words of Cairnes: "A rise or fall of *wages* in a country, so far forth as it is general, has no tendency to affect the *course* of foreign trade." There is here no statement about totals, and no reference to the case of a rise of wages forced by a time law. But in any case Cairnes' dictum is rebutted above.

<sup>2</sup> P. 119. Cf. p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> P. 119, *note*.

<sup>4</sup> P. 87.

that in this case the risk would be very short, asserting that "the money hitherto spent on these blood-stained commodities [of the sweated trades], *the capital* hitherto employed in their production, and the labour devoted to their manufacture, would alike be transferred—mediately, if not immediately<sup>1</sup>—to other industries" under an Eight Hours Law. But they do not put this on the law of differential advantages. They go on to say that "the necessity for increasing the staff *in all industries*, which a reduction of hours would probably involve, would *at once* enable these workers to be absorbed, possibly at higher wages, and certainly under better conditions than they had hitherto enjoyed." And this optimistic doctrine they carry even further. After stating<sup>2</sup> that the effect upon prices of a general shortening of hours would be "neither a general rise of values nor of prices, but a disturbance of both, some values rising and others falling," they affirm on the very next page that "price is probably the most rigid of all the possible economic variants likely to be affected;" and then they quote this extraordinary deliverance of Mr. Thorold Rogers:—

"It is really the case, however, that the liberal reward of labour is followed by a material enhancement of price. *No one believes that if the London seamstresses, tailors, and matchbox-makers received double the wages which they do at present, there would be an appreciable difference in the price of the products sold, or any present risk that any of these industries would cease to be plied in this country.*"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I do not know what this phrase means.

<sup>2</sup> P. 114.

<sup>3</sup> "Work and Wages," edition cited, p. 203.

This passage is primarily instructive as showing how far the pursuit of the "historic method," so-called, may lead an economist out of sight of economic law. As it stands, it is almost meaningless. Everything depends on *how* the rise of wages comes about. If the seamstresses and matchbox-makers get the rise by reason of greatly increased demand for their labour, or restriction of their own number, prices certainly *will* rise. If they get the rise because prices have already risen by reason of defect of raw material, then clearly their rise of wages is not *followed* by rise of price. If they get the rise by reason of a sudden increase in the *efficiency* of their industry, they being able by their unions to force from the employers a good share of profits, then, indeed, their rise of wages need be neither preceded nor followed by a rise in prices. But in that case labour and capital will assuredly rush into the new field, prices will fall, and wages will fall likewise. Professor Rogers' proposition, when worked out, is economically null, because he cannot have been thinking of a rise of wages *enforced by law*. Yet Messrs. Webb & Cox quote it in italics as above, when all the while they are affirming, as we have seen, that certain industries *will* cease to be plied when the employers are forced either to pay the same wages for shorter hours or to work shorter hours at all. They themselves deny what, in the quotation from Mr. Rogers, they have affirmed.

As for their claim that the labour and capital thrown out by crushing the sweated industries will be "at once," or "mediately if not immediately,"

(whatever that may mean,) absorbed by other industries, it has not a leg to stand upon. The other industries, on their own showing, would be the advantaged industries, in which labour goes much further than in the lowest marginal industries, so that even if much more labour were needed in them—a point on which, as on so many others, Messrs. Webb & Cox contradict themselves<sup>1</sup>—and even if machinery were not rapidly improved, as Messrs. Webb & Cox themselves admit<sup>2</sup> it is likely to be, the labour called for would not be absorbed in the ratio of the displacement of the labour that has been working to the least advantage. Besides, if a number of the lowest industries are at once crushed, the extra hands thus thrown on the other industries will more or less suffice to *prevent* wages from rising. Finally, if there is not an increased *demand* for products, whether home or foreign, prices and wages cannot both be kept up. And it is always the tendency, under the regimen of saving and investment, to cut down consumption when prices rise.

## V.

There remains to be considered the hypothesis that a rise in the prices of the products of our advantaged exporting industries will not lessen our imports. Here perhaps there is the greatest risk

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<sup>1</sup> They affirm that in many cases the output in an Eight Hours Day is as great as in a longer one ; and they also make the contrary statement above quoted.

<sup>2</sup> P. 110,

of confusion in our reasoning. Mr. Scott Moffat (of whom I must always speak with gratitude for help to right thinking on some leading economic issues, while forced to reject some of his doctrines) works out the question in his "Economy of Consumption" in a way that suggests the rising of difficulties on his view as he proceeds. In that work, which is much less known than it deserves to be, he urges on the workers, in a very interesting section, a "time policy," not in the shape of an Eight Hours Law, but by way of a voluntary plan of *always working shorter hours when wages fall*, and lengthening them only when wages rise. I will not here stay to discuss that proposal, but will quote the passage in which, after fully expounding it, Mr. Moffat goes on to meet the possible objection of injury to foreign trade. Let the reader note the bearing of the italicised passages:—

"There are two things of which foreign competition can never deprive a community : its natural resources and its industry. No foreign competition can, in the first place, drive our industry out of our own markets. Foreigners will not come to our markets unless they want something there. They will not sell to us, unless they wish to buy from us ; and *the more efficient their industry is, the more they will have to give for what they want from us.*" [If so, then *vice versâ*.] "Suppose the productiveness of the industry of any or every other community was increased twofold, and ours was to remain as it is, no commodity which we produce for our own use would lose any of its efficiency by the change ; and the *intrinsic value* of



the whole of this part of our production would remain unaltered." [All this is neither here nor there.] "If any part of our home produce was, owing to the superior productive power of foreign countries, replaced in our market by a foreign product, it would be because the foreign producer offered us more of it in exchange for our other productions than we could give ourselves, *thus enabling us to apply our industry to greater profit.*" [The orthodox thesis—that any amount of labour can be applied to any given industry.] "There is one case only in which the superior producing power of another community can injure us, when we go to the market of a third community to purchase some commodity which we require, and the rival community goes to the same market to purchase the same commodity with the superior appliances of its productive power. Even in this case the injury is contingent, not inevitable. Provided the commodity with which we and our rivals attempt to purchase is the same, or that the commodity of the rival community is in equal demand in the purchasing market with ours, our rival will certainly purchase cheaper than we can; but it does not therefore follow that the price to us will be higher than before. If our rival's demand is large, and the supply is limited, the price to us will certainly be raised; but it may happen by-and-by that this very demand produces a great increase in the supply, and that we, without any additional exertion on our part, may purchase cheaper than before. Or, if there is any commodity of ours which our rival requires, the rival community itself may be able to purchase the

commodity of the third community both for itself and us, and to sell it to us cheaper than we could have bought it for ourselves. *A community whose natural resources suffice for its maintenance* has thus nothing to dread from the superior industry or skill of other communities. Their possession of these advantages may do it good in many ways, and can do it harm in none, except perchance that, in the way indicated, it may have to pay a little dearer for some luxuries with which it is able to dispense."<sup>1</sup>

Here, it seems to me, Mr. Moffat has set out with the intention of broadly answering "the cry of danger from foreign competition," and, after working a certain distance, has found he is not meeting the case. For there is really no community such as he finally describes; and least of all is Britain such a community. He has thus left on paper, to small purpose, the mere out-throw of his first excavation. Thus are books made very big. Nor is the method up to Mr. Moffat's best level. To assume that every producer who supplies is *wanting* to buy, is the method of the earlier analysts, who overlooked the fact that men habitually want to sell without buying, by way of accumulating not wealth but claim-to-wealth, and who said that since the seller in effect *had* to buy, all his supply was demand. The wish to sell without buying is the perpetual frustration of productive energy in foreign as in home trade. Again, nothing is gained by putting the case of two communities trading with a third, for the economic is the same all over, if we

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<sup>1</sup> "Economy of Consumption," 1878, pp. 562-4.

accept the maxim of Dudley North. But it is needless to criticise Mr. Moffat's preliminary paragraph further, for he goes on to put the British case with much force and accuracy.

"It is otherwise with the communities which possess the exceptional industrial advantages. As already observed, every industrial advantage which is a mere saving of labour is a pure gain. But when the saving is differential, when one community possesses advantages which other communities do not possess, there is generated an unnatural growth of production, an abnormal increase of population. This population depends not on the natural resources of the country, but on its artificial [*sic*, but query] advantages; and as these are continually liable to forfeiture, it is in constant danger of having its means of subsistence withdrawn. To a community in these circumstances, foreign competition is a subject of real alarm."<sup>1</sup>

By "artificial advantages," I presume, Mr. Moffat must mean special temporary industrial advantages as distinguished from permanent ones; and Britain would, I presume, be classed by him as one of the communities he now describes. Thus he finally admits that our position is a precarious one. It is true, he goes on to argue very justly that there is the more reason why we should extract ourselves from our *impasse*, protesting against the doctrine that since we are already in a false position, "our only remedy is the desperate expedient of pushing ourselves into it still further." In that protest we can all join. But

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 564.

the practical question is, How are we to get out? And I cannot see that Mr. Moffat gives any countenance to the expedient of an Eight Hours Law, which is in no sense a check on the impetus carrying us into our fix. Mr. Moffat's own scheme is, on the face of it, much better, for it implies calculated and adjusted action on the part of the workers; and he clearly recognises that the solution of thrift is of no avail. I will sum up the issues, as I see them, by saying that to get out of the *impasse* there is needed an all-round policy of (1) raised standards of consumption; (2) restrained breeding; (3) national provision for old age; (4) national operation on social relations to the end of nationalising one by one all the present sources of idle living, including ground rent, which Mr. Moffat would not nationalise; and (5) immediate operation on the congested labour market by way of true public works—all these lines of action to be as far as possible concurrent.

## VI.

To bring out the central economic issues, let us say briefly that the increasing command of natural resources might be made to yield an increasing share of wealth all round if everybody adopted a rising standard of consumption, and if States provided systematically for old age and sickness, and if at the same time population were controlled. In that case we need have no fear of the emigration of mere capital. I have argued this at length elsewhere. But there is no prospect whatever of a rising standard of

consumption being speedily resorted to, and the economics of the Eight Hours Question is the economics of the present situation, in which everybody, broadly speaking, tends to restrict his consumption in order to accumulate future claim. This is the frustration of that indefinite multiplication of hand-work which the supporters of the Eight Hours Movement count upon. Messrs. Webb & Cox declare<sup>1</sup> that "the notion that labourers depend for their employment on work being 'found' for them is a widespread but stupid fallacy;" and they further state, as we have seen, that money formerly spent on commodities now rendered impossible of profitable production, and "the capital hitherto employed in their production, and the labour devoted to their manufacture, would alike be transferred—mediately, if not immediately—to other industries." The argument in the context is that increased demand for *labour* in other industries under an Eight Hours Law would absorb the workers thrown idle: nothing has been advanced to show how the capital would be similarly absorbed. But the general statement about the "stupid fallacy" of the notion that work must be found for labourers remains to mislead the student. It is not a fallacy, but a fact, that labour depends upon demand for services or commodities: the fallacy lies in the orthodox doctrine that it does not.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Webb was one of those who, five years ago, derided the London alderman who contended that a Lord Mayor's Banquet was good for trade. Mr. Webb, Socialist as he then was, took the orthodox position that if the money were put in the bank it

Messrs. Webb & Cox's epithet will be found, as it happens, to strike at Professor Marshall, who expressly argues<sup>1</sup> that the raising of the wages of tramway servants by the operation of a law restricting hours of work would check tramway extension, and therefore check the demand for the labour which makes tramway plant. I am not prepared to go so far as this: it does not seem to me to follow that tramways, under present conditions of life, may not go on at increased fares, or that capital may not be invested in them at lower rates of interest: but the argument surely counts for something against the summary conclusion of Messrs. Webb & Cox. If they mean to endorse the new and true doctrine that demand for commodities *does* mean demand for labour, but at the same time to contend that the labourers make their own market, they are overshooting the mark. It is going too fast, I fear, to assume with Messrs. Mummery & Hobson<sup>2</sup> that all increase in

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would be "productively expended"—as if the industrial trouble were want of money-capital for profitable undertakings. I understood Mr. Webb later to have abandoned this fallacy of the schools, were it only because it so completely undermined his Socialism. Yet here he seems to be again embracing it—unless, indeed, he means his expression to signify, as another passage in the same book (p. 150) suggests, that it is not capital that is wanted to "find work" for labourers, but that demand for goods will suffice. In that case he would be describing as "stupid" his own confident teaching of a few years ago.

<sup>1</sup> "Elements," p. 368.

<sup>2</sup> Messrs. Webb & Cox represent these able writers as arguing thus, but I cannot find the passage in their book. I understand their view to be that the wage-earners tend to spend

wages will mean increased consumption. The ideal of saving is ever before the workers. But in any case the mere increased consumption of common goods by the workers cannot suffice to keep the demand for labour always on the increase. There must be *higher* consumption. This is the answer to the optimism of Mr. Gunton, cited by Messrs. Webb & Cox<sup>1</sup> as arguing that the mere demand of better-paid labour will "lead to economies in production, thence to the cheapening of products, and thence to increased consumption." Let our past history supply the test. Wages *have* risen; there *have* been economies in production by way of new machinery which threw labour idle;<sup>2</sup> and still consumption has been mainly restricted to the goods which machinery too easily produces.

To divide consumers, again, as Messrs. Webb & Cox do, into "the million" and the "wealthy few," and to say that the latter practically cannot increase their consumption, while the former may do so in-

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increase of income in a higher proportion than other classes; and this is no doubt true.

<sup>1</sup> P. 149.

<sup>2</sup> I may here lay down the doctrine, which one would have expected Socialists to lay down for themselves, that our rapid advance in machinery is substantially anti-social while in progress, or, at least, that it means perpetual sacrifice. A Socialistic community would rightly supersede old machinery at a much slower rate than does an individualistic community, unless it found it had an immense surplus of labour-power. Its principle would be the economising of the total labour-power at any given moment. The present system means the destruction of the forces and the well-being of thousands to benefit the rest.

definitely, is to obscure the whole problem, to my thinking. Between the "wealthy few" and "the million," to begin with, there is the great middle and "lower middle" class. But the rich as well as the middle class can "increase its consumption," economically speaking, just as easily as the poorer classes can. The rich man can either demand higher artistic products, such as statues and pictures and finely carved furniture and plate and metal and stone-work, for himself, or consume by way of presenting galleries, libraries, and objects of art to the public, instead of heaping up more capital out of his income. The middle-class man can raise his kinds or standards of consumption in a hundred ways. And if these things be not done, the mere increased consumption of machine-made goods by the workers will never solve the industrial problem. Ultimately, of course, the rich man as such should disappear; but that is not the present issue.



## CHAPTER X.

### INDUSTRIES SEPARATELY CONSIDERED : HOME COMPETITIVE INDUSTRIES.

#### I.

THE foregoing reasoning, I think, will be found to partly cover the case of those industries which, in chapter viii. § 1, I specified as "home distributive and other industries competing together;" inasmuch as questions of the relation of price to consumption are there on the same footing; but a glance at some of these industries separately, and apart from the railways, may be useful. Messrs. Webb & Cox allude<sup>1</sup> to "countless" industries in which "there can be no question of foreign competition;" and they specify "the railway industry and other internal means of transport; building and engineering trades; baking, butchering, the supply of milk and various other commodities; the theatrical and newspaper industries; all the forms of artistic or personal service, and *innumerable* other departments of the industrial army." It would appear from this that Messrs. Webb & Cox, though they reject the idea of a general law, contemplate a possible restriction of the hours of labour

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<sup>1</sup> P. 118.

in nearly every form of occupation, including domestic service, picture painting, and acting. Mr. Shaw declares<sup>1</sup> that he "should not hesitate to go for an unconditional Eight Hours Bill all round." I suppose, however, that we need only discuss trades proper for the present, since even the Socialist wing does not yet appear to contemplate an Eight Hours Day for domestic servants and novelists.

## II.

Industries that would certainly be covered by a "general" Eight Hours Law are the food-supplying and shop-keeping, and their case is worth special attention. Let us take, for instance, the food-supplying trades. Their distribution is carried on, as regards some foods (grocers' goods, etc.), through wholesale and retail dealers; as regards others (milk, bread, and butcher-meat), through retailers either dealing almost directly with the first producers of the article, or retailing their own product. In none of these trades are individual profits high. Many retailers' clear incomes are no higher than those of many workmen, and many of them do their work themselves without subordinates save those of their own family. But if an Eight Hours Law is to be enforced in the shops where there are paid hands, it must be enforced in those where the shopkeepers do all their own work, otherwise the law would be simply a measure in favour of small shops against large. As a matter of

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<sup>1</sup> Debate cited, p. 74.

fact, many small shopkeepers can only hold out against the large by keeping longer hours ; and this is one of the reasons for that opposition to legal restriction of shop hours which Mr. Shaw condemns<sup>1</sup> without the slightest consideration of the details of the case.<sup>2</sup> In any view, a general Eight Hours Law in such trades would infallibly raise prices. Mr. Shaw's simple theorem that prices would be forced back by stinted demand can soon be disposed of here. If the milkman is forced to adopt an Eight Hours Day, he must either shut shop about 2 p.m. or even earlier, or set up two shifts in his shop and raise his prices. He might, indeed, close during mid-day hours and open again in the evening, but this, too, would mean endless inconvenience ; and the inconvenience would fall more on the working class than on any other. The result in several trades would certainly be a new opening for the itinerant coster, in which case the shopkeeper would have a very clear grievance. So with the butcher. Present prices cannot be maintained on a double shift ; prices must rise because the article is so nearly necessary ; and the shopkeeper can *not* beat down his landlord, because,

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<sup>1</sup> Debate cited, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> A striking sample of the irrational empiricism of labour-regulating philanthropists is the recent proposal to regulate women's hours in shops. Its effects would be first to advantage married men whose wives and daughters helped them, and widows and spinsters keeping their own shops, as against bachelors whose women-hands were hired ; and next to drive women out of employment. Yet this absurd measure was applauded in the Liberal press.

while the supply of butcher-meat is slowly extensible, the supply of ground space is not. In the case of the baker the same law will hold good still more emphatically. On Mr. Shaw's view, the price of bread could never rise. But it rises and falls frequently, according to wheat prices; and an Eight Hours Law would operate like a scarcity of wheat in raising cost of production. People must have bread, and most will rather pay more than consume less. Now the smallest-coin-increase in the price of a loaf is a serious deduction from real wages in a workman's family; and the stinting of bread is pure hardship. It may be indeed that the bread-making industry is one in which more work could be turned out per head in eight-hour shifts than in longer ones; but in that case there is clearly no gain in respect of employment of labour. One way or the other, the workers will be disappointed. And the bread-selling business being all the while under the operation of an Eight Hours Law, either prices must rise on that score, or the working-class public must endure much inconvenience. The thing is inevitable. And this is the answer to the suggestion of Professor Marshall<sup>1</sup> that the net produce would be increased in some branches of industry by introducing two shifts of eight hours. The effect would simply be to employ the same or even fewer hands in fewer factories, and to lessen relatively the demand for machines of a given kind—a much more serious consideration than the lack of skilled labour, posited by Professor Marshall as an

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<sup>1</sup> "Elements," p. 366.

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obstacle to the rapid adoption of double shifts. In the case of such services as those of omnibuses and tramcars, again, double shifts, so far as can be gathered from a calculation of profits, must mean either lowered wages or raised fares; and here the working classes would be hit the most heavily of all. Thus once more the hopes of the workers would be foiled. It remains to be considered whether one more expectation founded on a prospective Eight Hours Law would be any better fulfilled.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE EFFECTS OF FIXED HOURS ON TRADE FLUCTUATIONS.

#### I.

ONE of the most catching pleas for a fixed legal working day, the most attractive, indeed, next to the primary plea for leisure, is that it would go far to correct the present fluctuations of trade. Thus in Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield's treatise,<sup>1</sup> we find Mr. Hadfield—

“Strongly inclined to think that shorter hours would eventually *lead to more uniform output, and, to some extent, assist in modifying the serious fluctuations of business, which are baneful alike to master and man.* . . . Under the present system, too often there is extreme high pressure at one time, followed by a reversal which is exceedingly disastrous to all concerned. Trade suddenly expands, machinery is wanted in haste, telegrams fly to and fro, promises are made which often *cannot be performed.* If an order of importance is given, probably penalties are specified. The manufacturer is in a state of feverish anxiety until the matter is cleared off his books. Overtime must be worked, and there is high pressure all round. If a *uniform day* existed, and overtime *were made more difficult*, all employers in each particular branch *being on the same footing* would alike *work under the same conditions*, and would not have the temptations as at present to outbid one another and work at such high

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<sup>1</sup> “A Shorter Working Day,” pp. 116-7.

pressure. Probably under such an altered state of conditions, the original requirer of the machine ordered, in making up his plans, knowing the impossibility of breaking the law, would not be in that *chronic* state of tension that *now so often* exists. He would *know* that all manufacturers from whom tenders were invited *were on the same footing*, and that if overtime was worked it would *probably* be at such excessive rates *as to make him think twice* before specifying an unreasonable time for delivery. It would act in the same way with the manufacturer, who, in order to tender at the lowest price consistent with profit, would not be tempted to reckon upon overtime."

Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield tell us that they are respectively man of business and economic student. If one had not had some real assistance from their book, one would be tempted to say that in it the man of business has been unduly influential in loosening the style and confusing the argument; and the economic student unduly apparent in defective knowledge of facts, *eg.*, the repeated intimation that "for some reason or other" the miners want a legal Eight Hours Day when for the most part they have already got an Eight Hours Day, the reason being left a mystery to the last.

Mr. Hadfield here sets forth what appears to me to be a mere confusion of ideas. He repeatedly tells us that under a fixed day manufacturers would all be "on the same footing." Well, are they not all on the same footing now, when their freedom is the same? Mr. Hadfield first says the fixed day would "lead to" more uniform output, and then that it would "to some extent assist" in modifying fluctuations of output. What is it to assist? He speaks of overtime as a possibility after he has assumed a fixed legal day,

leaving it wholly in the vague how overtime is to be "made more difficult," if it is allowed at all. The implication is simply *that overtime should be fixed at high rates*, which is a proposal that *wages should be controlled by legislation*. This Mr. Hadfield himself has admitted to be out of the question. He says that the orderer would "know that overtime would *probably* be at such rates as to make him think twice." Would not the orderer know what the rates for overtime would be? If not, could not the manufacturer tell him? Would anybody know? If not, overtime would certainly be "difficult," but so would business be, I fancy.

## II.

Perhaps the best way to meet Mr. Hadfield's very mixed proposition is to ask in a business-like way what would happen under an Eight Hours Law (*a*) with or (*b*) without overtime, when somebody wanted machines or goods in a hurry. That such demands would arise, it seems unnecessary to prove. They arise at present for this among other reasons, that openings for profitable investment of capital are eagerly competed for; and this competition exists because in our social system men seek to provide for old age, or leisure, or their families, by means of interest from investments. This state of things remaining, the competition would remain under an Eight Hours Law. Orderers then would still at times want to have work done very quickly; and they would know that makers could meet their wishes *by calling in extra hands*, if there were unem-



ployed hands to call in. Now, an Eight Hours Law will either cause absorption of the unemployed, or it will not. I think not. But even if it does, that consummation will (1) attract unemployed from other countries, and (2) stimulate population, unless a check is put on immigration, and the workers are taught in some newly-effective way to put a check on their families, neither of which safeguards seems to be dreamt of by the advocates of an Eight Hours Law. Then there would be an unemployed fringe, and batches of sudden orders would simply mean sudden employment for that fringe, and sudden influxes of immigrants, *and this in a much higher degree than happens now.* Where overtime is freely allowed, sudden pressures can be in large part met without altering the number of men in employment. Where overtime is not allowed, sudden pressures will call for extra hands, and will encourage the growth of a precariously-employed class. In that respect we should simply be out of the frying-pan into the fire.

There remains the alternative of permitting overtime, but making it "more difficult."<sup>1</sup> I repeat that the only meaning I can attach to these words is the fixing of extra high rates for overtime; and that this

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<sup>1</sup> Messrs. Webb & Cox, pointing out (p. 157) that with one or two specific cases of exception, no overtime at all is now permitted in English textile factories, remark that it is "obvious that an Eight Hours Law which did not exclude habitual overtime would be simply delusive," but add that it is equally obvious that there are emergencies in which it ought to be permitted. They would, however, exclude overtime for the mere purpose of meeting a press of orders.

is virtually a fixing of wages, a thing which Mr. Hadfield says Parliament has never succeeded in doing, and probably never will succeed in doing. But let us suppose it tried. Suppose it to be enacted that overtime must always be paid for at triple rates per hour. Will not masters and men together either contrive to evade such a law by bogus money-transactions, or agree to bring down the normal day-wages in order to admit of overtime? Let us suppose they do not. Then either the working of overtime will be so difficult that it will rarely occur, in which case there will just be that increase of a precariously-employed class above described, or overtime will be worked pretty frequently, with greater gain to the workers than now happens. Trade in the terms of the case fluctuates just as before.<sup>1</sup>

### III.

There is another problem which comes under the general head of trade fluctuation, namely, the existence of "season trades." When you point to these as a difficulty in the way of a general Eight Hours Law, Socialists tell you that they want to make season trades impossible, that is, they want to get rid of the "demoralising" state of things in which many people are very busily employed for some weeks or months at a particular trade, and during the rest of the year are either slackly employed at it or have to take to

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<sup>1</sup> It fluctuates at present in those textile industries in which Messrs. Webb & Cox point out there is no overtime.

other occupations. But the effect of an Eight Hours Law would not at all be to make an end of these irregularities. An Eight Hours Law for house-building or chimney-sweeping, or straw-hat-making, or cycle-making, or skate-making (I suppose we need not consider harvest-work, which even the zealots of uniformity do not propose to restrict), will simply encourage the employment of *more hands* in these industries at the busy times of the year. As things are, a chimney-sweep works hardest in the cold months. In summer he may take to other jobs. (I do not know the practice.) But if an Eight Hours Law should force more men into his trade in winter, even if his wages do not fall, there will be so many more men looking for other jobs in summer. If they get them, well and good: it does not appear that *regular* changes of occupation are so very bad. But, for good or bad, the season trades will remain as before. If they are demoralising, there will be more people demoralised.

The only ways in which ups and downs of demand for special articles can ever be modified are (1) the development of unwonted self-denial among consumers as regards some articles, and (2) the accumulation of stocks of some other articles under a distributive system (say, a socialistic one) which excludes the present motive of the dealer's objection to long-unsold or doubtful stock. And even then there would still be industries in which irregular hours *must* be worked, were it only because the weather is not under legislative control.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE POLITICAL SIDE OF THE CASE.

#### I.

WE have thus looked cursorily and inadequately, but still, I hope, a little more circumspectly than has been done on the opposite side, into the pure economics of the Eight Hours Question. But it was observed at the outset that there is a strictly political as well as a strictly economic side to the question; and if the study have not already exhausted the reader, he will perhaps bear with a final examination of the former.

There is a science of politics as well as a science of economics; but one would expect an economist to make the most and not the least of the frequent dependence of politics upon economic knowledge. Yet we find that Professor Marshall, whose resistance to the contentions of the Eight Hours party has been above noted, suddenly concludes his economic argument with a "caution against crude arguments from facts,"<sup>1</sup> directing the caution not against the enthusiasts, who have advanced crude arguments innumerable, but against those who analyse these arguments; and he sums up by saying that "all this tends to

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<sup>1</sup> "Elements," p. 371.

show that a general reduction of the hours of labour is likely to cause a little net material loss and much moral good"—in respect of increased leisure. Even this summing-up he qualifies by the distinct avowal that the problem "is not adapted for treatment by a rigid cast-iron system, and that the conditions of each class of trades must be studied separately." Unfortunately, many philanthropic people, and most advocates of the Eight Hours Law, are almost certain to take the proposition about a "general reduction of the hours of labour" without weighing the qualification, and to stake everything on the hoped-for "moral good." Thus is politics confounded instead of being elucidated by economists of standing. Professor Marshall was anxious to introduce his moral sympathies into the exposition somewhere, and the result is a maximum of inconsequence and a minimum of enlightenment.

It is with regret that I dispute Professor Marshall's power of sound prescription in the matter. He has diagnosed the case without once recognising (what he is otherwise aware of) one of the main conditions, namely, increase of population; and he endorses a "general" reduction of hours, which he cannot possibly reduce to particulars, without a glance at the inevitable *sequelæ*. I can foresee nothing but harm from such a prescription. Every right-thinking person would be willing to suffer "a little net material loss" in order to win "much moral good" for the mass of the population, if that were the whole of the case. But the net material loss contemplated by Professor Marshall is not anything like the loss that would

accrue from an Eight Hours Law, for he is really excluding the operation of an Eight Hours Law, though he only says so by a generality ; and the moral good he contemplates would be neutralised by the moral evil which he overlooks. He ends the chapter under notice with a paragraph on the injury done to the young by joyless homes, concluding thus :—"Not only the individuals concerned, but society as a whole has a direct interest in the curtailment of extravagantly long hours of duty away from home, *even for mineral guards and others*, whose work is not in itself very hard." The effect of this remark taken by itself would probably be to encourage a law for the restriction of the hours of railway servants. Taken more broadly, it only reaffirms the unquestioned advantage of leisure, without recognising the main obstacles in thoughtless human practice to the general acquisition of leisure.

## II.

The most plausible, in seeming, of the arguments for a time law, is the plea that the method of strikes, which is the only alternative one, is injurious to social peace. At a time when so many of us have come to feel the gross impropriety of allowing what are now the real highways of the country, the railways, to remain closed for weeks or months while companies and men are fighting out a private war, this plea must make some impression. Messrs. Webb & Cox<sup>1</sup> observe that—

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<sup>1</sup> P. 128. Cf. p. 172.

“It is interesting to note that those who advise the miners to shorten their hours by trade union action are advising them to tax the public for their own advantage, without seeking the public's consent. This appears to be as much open to ethical criticism as the action of landlords in maintaining the Corn Laws, or that of the capitalists who formed the Chicago ‘Wheat Corner’ or Paris ‘Copper Ring.’”

Here, it will be observed, it is admitted that the effect of an Eight Hours Law for mines will be to raise the price of coal; a burden which the same writers on the same page say the public are willing to bear. It is difficult to see the difference between one section of the public saying that the rest will be ready to pay more for its coals when a strike raises the price (for this is really what is done by those who recommend the method of strikes), and another section saying that the rest is willing to pay extra as the result of an Eight Hours Law. Either way, “the public,” as a collective entity, has never been polled; and if an Eight Hours Law is carried, a large section will have its views set aside.

But the weakness of the anti-strike plea goes deeper than this. Those who feel the proved risk of blockade of the railways, under private management, to be a reason for nationalising them, have to face the difficulty left, that under national management a general strike is still conceivable. But at least they can claim that it would be much more unlikely, and they can hope to evade any such crisis by making any general grievance of railwaymen a parliamentary question. An Eight Hours Law, however, would really give no security whatever against strikes. The sincerity of

the argument on this head can easily be tested. It will not be disputed that the great majority of strikes are strikes for wages. Then, if the argument for legislative as against trade action be valid, it would involve *à fortiori* the settling of *wages* by law, a thing which no writer on the subject has yet ventured to propose. And, in point of fact, there is every likelihood that the passing of a time law would precipitate strikes. Messrs. Webb & Cox, in arguing against leaving the matter to the method of strikes, expressly put it that "employers who see their *chances of doing a profitable trade suddenly dashed to the ground* by a cunningly-timed strike, will find it difficult to repress feelings of bitter indignation." Either the writers expect that an Eight Hours Law may operate in this way, or the argument as against a strike for shorter hours is quite irrelevant. But in any case, a reduction of wages, we have seen, is likely to be one of the first effects of a legal restriction of hours. This is in part implicitly admitted in the argument that any gain of shorter hours by strikers "would be relentlessly cancelled in times of depression."<sup>1</sup> Then would the workers, or would they not, be prompt to strike when first, under the new time law, the masters sought to balance the shortened hours by lower wages? Obviously they would. If they could afford to take shorter hours with lower wages, they might in many cases have had them ere now. Then the pretence that a time law would avert strikes falls to the ground. We should probably have more

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 173.



strikes than ever. And the matter would not end there. Already some labour leaders are talking of a wages law, though none of their literary backers have ventured so far. But a wages law would be justifiable by the same set of arguments as they are using, if these arguments are good for a time law. We should have to proceed from one interference to another, and always on unscientific and uneconomic lines. In the effort to regulate industry we should be getting further and further from real control of its forces and tendencies.

### III.

The perception of this, it is clear, underlay the opposition offered to the Eight Hours Movement by Mr. Bradlaugh, whom Messrs. Webb & Cox seek to confute by the inexpensive devices of twitting him with "bygone Liberalism" and "Manchester economics," and with inconsistency in view of his own Truck Act. We have seen that Messrs. Webb & Cox (or one of them) again and again resort to the mere dicta of the Manchester school to make good their own case; but their inconsistency here is not worse than their evasion of the plain distinction drawn by Mr. Bradlaugh between the political significances of different sorts of interference with industry. He sought to show (*a*) that a time law would derange industry, and (*b*) that it was an attempt to protect the men, not against the mere individual rapacity of employers, but against the very laws of the economic situation. There is all the difference in the world between an attempt of this

sort and the act of protecting scattered groups of workers against the unfair and sinister action of special sets of employers, who force their men to take their wages in goods, or at public-houses, where they are almost bound to drink ; and it argues either uncandour or shortsightedness to say that the minor interference logically leads in politics to the major. Messrs. Webb & Cox by that argument have lightly placed themselves in a grave dilemma. If any one act of interference with industry suffices politically to justify any other, there is (once more) a clear political case for a wages law. Are they prepared to urge that ? Do they or do they not admit that it is a mistake to make the workers think that Parliament can guarantee them good wages, they themselves doing nothing to alter the economic situation ? If the critics admit it, they are taking up exactly the position of Mr. Bradlaugh, who all his life had his own doctrine of how the workers were to gain a better position, and to that end bore infinite odium from the middle classes, a course in which his censors are not likely to emulate him. I am not endorsing his economics, from which I diverge, but simply claiming that his sociology, his politics, was much sounder than that of his assailants.

#### IV.

I will not here attempt to set forth at length the very real social dangers of an all-round interference with the hours of labour ; but it is necessary to de-

clare with emphasis, in the face of the fashionable empirical Socialism, that there are such dangers. I do not deny that often the opposition to a legislative interference with freedom is instinctive, the aversion to such interference being felt before the arguments against it are formulated; but it is equally true, for one thing, that the desire for interference is often the outcome of a happy-go-lucky inclination, which decides its policy first and seeks justifications after. And in the latter case the instinct is certainly no weightier than in the former. It does not follow that because many workmen, leading hard lives, and accustomed to the necessary coercion of their unions, are ready for wholesale legal restriction, the restriction would therefore be salutary. The instinct of freedom, if often astray, must necessarily be often right. Many people are now proceeding from a perception that *laissez-faire* has involved misery, to an uncalculating determination to abolish *laissez-faire* anyhow. They begin to delight in restriction for restriction's sake, thinking they establish human solidarity by every act of the kind. "Fabian" writers are found claiming that all individual faculties are the property of society. But that is precisely the doctrine of the most fanatical of the Jacobins of the French Revolution, whose blind coercive action weakened social solidarity instead of increasing it. The evil is that humanitarians so often refuse to think out the real effects of their interferences. To go back to Spencer's illustration, they hammer directly on the bulge in the iron plate, and then they refuse to recognise that they have merely driven the bulge

to the other side. When, after listening to the claims made for the beneficent operation of the Factory Acts in the past, I go to the factories and see the human beings who are multiplied under these protective laws, I am involuntarily filled with a sombre derision for the philanthropists who thought they were settling the problem by such devices as these. Claiming to resist *laissez-faire*, they merely closed a few of the side paths which blind human instinct had opened for itself, not only leaving open the turnpike road of sexual instinct and procreation, but saving new pedestrians for it by checking the minor forces of destruction.

These spasmodic acts of philanthropy are really often recognisable as attempts to evade by a legal expedient the responsibility of personal action on the part of the philanthropists. Much might now be done to lessen overwork by conscientious individual and collective action apart from the law. The case of the hospital nurses, dwelt on by Messrs. Webb & Cox, is one in point. The class who subscribe to the hospitals could easily force a reform if they would; but it is so much simpler a course to order their Member of Parliament to vote for a new law.

I am not arguing against the rational regulation of human life. I am pleading for it. But the methods now being proposed by our Socialists and philanthropists are no more a rational regulation of human life than was the system of doles of food to the Roman populace by the tyrants who debased while fostering it. Let short-sighted Socialists deny it a hundred times over, it remains unalterably true that the one

security for human elevation is the consciousness of *self*-rule, *self*-reliance, and *self*-determination. And to think to secure this attitude all round by legislating for the protection of masses of helpless workers without showing them the essentials in which they *must* help themselves, is only to prepare such a collapse for our civilisation as others have ended in, or at best to prolong the desperate probation of the present. I find Professor Marshall avowing<sup>1</sup> that "the progress of sanitary science has kept alive many people who are unfit for any but the lowest grade of work," without once, so far as I can see, telling how this "evil paradox" is practically to be solved. And where some of us, seeing the paradox, seek our way to a scientific solution, in the teeth of the crude opposition of ascetics, hypocrites, pietists, and optimist Socialists, there are plenty of others who, caring too little to find a solution, merely turn the paradox against the cause of humanity all round. For them, every failure of a blundering humanitarian expedient is an argument against all humane expedients, all regulation whatever. Nay, there is arising a new class of not inhumane men who, seeing how blundering the mass of humane expedients hitherto have been, are conscientiously opposed to all extension of the sphere of regulation. Such men, if sometimes in alliance with the other sort, are becoming a party in the State. Optimistic Socialism, unprescient of defeat, faces them all with a light heart, secure in the very helplessness of the masses whose blind force it

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<sup>1</sup> "Elements," p. 275.

hopes to use; and careful to avoid even the suggestion that in the most fundamental matters of individual action the workers can control their own lives. It will be denied, doubtless, that this is the position of Socialism. I will then attempt to show from Socialist handling of the Eight Hours Question that it is really so. But first of all the economic bearing of the law of population must be re-stated in the present connection.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE POPULATION CRUX.

#### I.

AT no time, perhaps, has the scientific doctrine of population been more misconceived and misrepresented than it is at present in this country, though at no time has the practical recognition of it been more widespread. Not once, but a score of times, I have met with journalistic and other assertions that the thesis of Malthus has been overthrown, and the fear of over-population proved groundless. In hardly a single case will it be found that the assertion is made by anyone who has studied Malthus; but the denial is none the less effective for popular purposes. It generally takes the form of one of three propositions: (1) that Malthus did not foresee the increase in the amount of grain produced in the United States and elsewhere; (2) that there is now food enough, and may always be food enough, for the whole human race if only wealth be properly distributed; (3) that immense territories are still unpeopled, or only slightly peopled. The last has been the empirical answer to Malthus all along, and is always made in disregard of two facts—(a) that many deaths are due to over-population here and now, and (b) that only great

distress can supply the motive force for deporting surplus population wholesale to foreign countries, whether or not the deported population can thrive or live there. For artisans the possible openings are certainly not large; and where it is possible in a new country to earn a livelihood by primary methods, the settler has to work a good deal more than eight hours a day to manage it. This, of course, is no argument against deporting surplus population to new soil; but when there is no machinery for such deportation, and no prospect of it, the insistence on the possibility is a peculiarly worthless answer to the statement that population tends naturally to excess, and needs to be restrained by prudence when it is not restrained by destructive and other preventive checks.

The appeal to the increased cultivation of cereals in new countries, and similarly the appeal to the possibility of improved agriculture everywhere, misses the very essence of the Malthusian statement, which is that population tends to increase *in an excessive ratio* to food. The proposition is, not at all that we have got to the end of the world's food resources, but that if population is by new food supply made free to increase, and is uncontrolled by prudence, it will tend to increase faster than the food supply is increased. That is to say, more children will be born than can be properly reared, and their early death will be the means by which the *net* population, from census to census, is kept within the food limit. The elasticity of the standard of nutrition will permit of a larger number being reared at one time than at another on the same



amount of food ; but, allowing for this—which means higher or lower efficiency of feeding—the existing food supply is the limit of population. There is much unintelligent repetition, in this connection, of the protest that *wealth* is increasing faster than population ; many publicists pointing to this as a confutation of Malthus. But the estimated increase of “wealth” is in large part indistributable and illusory, mere increased *values* of unchanging objects, as sites and pictures, being reckoned as national gain. The basis of population is not money-values, but food, room, and other necessities ; and it lies in the nature of the case that the faster people multiply the more they trench on the sources of food by covering more land with dwellings.

Supposing, then, the yield of the “Mississippi valley” could be decupled, population, barring prudential restraint, will tend to be decupled still faster ; and the faster population spreads in the said valley, the more land will be withdrawn from possible cultivation. The only way to prevent overbalance is to secure that the instinctive forces which increase population shall be kept in check by prudence, so that the *blind* natural force shall not outrun the *intelligent* force of industry. Hitherto, the blind force, with ups and downs caused by famines and plenties, pestilences and wars, has always tended to outrun the intelligent ; and this has held true of periods in which the *net* population of a given country has not been increasing at all. *Gross* increase may go with *net* decrease—the decrease in that case representing the play of destructive checks. Even gross decrease does not

clash with the law of population. Among preventive checks, that of hindrance to marriage of young people—so common in the Middle Ages—may seem to negate the tendency of population to increase, when it is really part of the proof.

And the law holds good no matter what be the efficiency or equality of the distribution of wealth. For if the lot of all our poor were so bettered within a year that fair comfort became universal, one of the results would be (unless the lesson of prudence were learned in the meantime) that the population would increase much *more* rapidly than before, because not merely of new births and immigration, but of the much greater *proportion* of infants who would be kept alive. With such general distribution of wealth as we all wish for, population would easily double in twenty years, unless the lesson of prudential restraint be learned step for step with the improvement. And this is the answer to the old argument from the Irish famine. Had the Irish peasants for a generation before all owned their land, and multiplied up to their *increased power* of rearing offspring, there would have been twice as many of them, or more, to suffer from the famine, and the margin of produce, which in the actual event represented rent for exportation, would not have existed.

## II.

While the law of the instinctive increase of population is combated all round on one or other of the

theoretical grounds above considered, the practical action of the majority of the workers recognises or implies it. No matter what a good trade unionist believes as to the possibility of increasing food supply, he takes care that the number of apprentices entering his trade shall be restricted. The astonishing thing is that while doing this he does not, as a rule, yet recognise that the number of his own children ought to be restricted for exactly the same reasons. Too often he procreates children who, in the terms of the case, go to swell the number in excess of the labour openings. That is to say, he applies restriction only where it means the maximum of misery, when he might apply it where it means prevention of misery. Of the necessity of the restriction there can be no question. A few years ago there was formed a new union of unskilled labourers—the dockers, and the demotic and other journals hailed the circumstance as the dawn of a new era. But in a very short time the Dockers' Union had to close its roll; and then some (not all, of course) of the same journals denounced them, though they were only doing in their way what the skilled unions do in theirs, and what every union *must* do if it is to subsist, in a society where population is not sufficiently controlled by prudence. What none of the popular journals saw or said, was that the true cure for the case of the dockers is restriction of rate of breeding, whether with or without the restoration of some part of the town population to the land.

But it is not only among the hand-workers that the factor of population is denied in theory while it is

perceived in practice. The surplusage of persons is visible in the struggle of the shopkeepers, who are so visibly in excess of the economic needs; of the middlemen; of the professional men. Hundreds of middle-class fathers "provide" for their sons by giving them a lump sum and sending them to America or the colonies, where there is at least land for stock-rearing. And yet these fathers will in many cases be among the last to admit that there is over-population, partly because they for their part can "provide" for their sons (the case of the daughters may be left to the imagination), and partly because men are naturally loth to admit that they have lived inconsiderately. They will rather take credit to themselves for having contrived somehow to rear a large family, putting out of thought what it has meant in restriction of free life for the child-bearer in the partnership, or, where the family is poor, what it has meant in restriction of life for the children.

### III.

Happily, the lesson is at length being learned by many. Those who denounce or deride neo-Malthusianism little know how much of misery it has already obviated. But for its propaganda, the industrial situation in this country at this moment would be much worse than it really is. During the years 1886-1890 there has been a marked decline in the number of births, along with an increase in the

number of marriages. The figures were, for England and Wales :—

Year.	Estimated Population.	Total Births.	Deaths.	Marriages.
1886	27,521,780	903,216	537,078	195,806
1887	27,826,798	886,017	530,577	200,175
1888	28,135,197	879,263	510,690	203,456
1889	28,447,014	885,179	517,968	213,696
1890	28,762,287	869,937	562,248	223,028

Thus, while in 1890 there were 27,222 more marriages than in 1886, there were 33,279 fewer births.<sup>1</sup> Had the births been in the same proportion to the marriages as in 1886, the number would have been 1,028,785, or 158,848 more than have actually taken place. The decrease in 1890, no doubt, was partly due to the influenza, which so greatly increased the mortality here, as in France, where its ravages have been a main cause of that fall of the birth-total below

<sup>1</sup> The birth-rate in 1890 (30·2 per 1000 persons living) was the lowest yet recorded ; the maximum (36·3 per 1000) having been attained in 1876. In 1891, however, with only 3000 more marriages than in 1890, there was a sudden increase in the birth-total from 869,937 to 914,157 (31·4 per 1000). That proportion is noted by the Registrar-General as “still below the average” ; but the rise is so great as to suggest the influence of panic over the French statistics. The Registrar-General, in ascribing the increase to the marriages of several previous years, admits that it is impossible to bring the birth-rate and the marriage-rate into “harmonious correspondence.”

the death-total which has given rise to so much uncomprehending comment.<sup>1</sup> But that much must also be due to domestic prudence is clear from the continuity of the decline, broken though it is by the birth-rate of 1891. Yet even with the decreasing birth-rate the annual increment of population has been too great for the elasticity of the industrial system; and in the five years under notice it lies on the face of the figures that the population is finally 524,544 less than it would have been if the excess of births over deaths had all been added to the net population.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, a balance of about half-a-million of emigrants over immigrants, broadly speaking, have found the struggle for existence here so hard that they have sought their fortunes elsewhere. And had the birth-rate of 1886 been maintained, there would have been so many more hundreds of thousands of children who, for part or the whole of these five years, would have shared more or less in the hardships of the majority, the chances of those destined to survive, among the poorer classes, being thus worsened all round, and the standard of comfort among the workers being proportionally prevented from rising.

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<sup>1</sup> The decline in the number of French marriages for a number of years had also something to do with the commercial loss involved in the destruction of the vines. The number of marriages in 1891 was 285,458, being 16,126 more than in 1890, and the highest number since 1884. The births were 28,318 more than in 1890, when the great fall in births as well as the increase in deaths was mainly attributable to the *grippe*.

<sup>2</sup> The Registrar-General, in his Report for 1890, observes that "had the rate of growth in 1871-1887 been maintained, the

## IV.

The desperate fact that hundreds of thousands of these children have died or will die children, from sheer want of proper sustenance and healthy surroundings, is a main part of the tragedy of over-population, and yet their disappearance seems to blind many people to the tragedy altogether. While they are dying in the darkness of the slums and the wildernesses of huddled houses, the philanthropist and the politician tell us that there is no over-population—this with the mobs of unemployed in chronic congregation, and nothing but the map of the sparsely-inhabited areas of the planet to sustain them. The wheat-raising power of the Mississippi valley is to balance the actual existence of the men who have been raised and the children who have been begotten. And the very Socialists who voice the hunger of the hungry must needs proclaim that nothing but “redistribution of wealth” is needed to put all right; that the world is built to go prosperously if only the instinct of individualist competition be checked; the other animal instincts being in no need of regulation.

Now, there are some of us who are eager to do something for the unemployed out of hand; who would do it, if we could, by far more direct means than an Eight Hours Law is even pretended to do.

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population in the middle of 1890 would have amounted to 29,407,649, whereas the results of the recent census reduce the estimate to 28,762,287, showing an excess of the earlier over the later estimate of no less than 645,362.” This, I presume, allows for emigration, and points to birth-restriction.

And yet if we had our way, unless we realised our hopes in the matter of bringing home to the workers the need of prudence in procreation, we should only be on the road to a vaster and more desperate problem still, for which there would be none but a deadly solution. For the lesson of family prudence is only beginning to be learned among us; and there is always the terrible risk that a rapid improvement in the lot of the worse-fated workers will mean a blind increase in procreation. In a former period, from 1821 to 1861, the rate of increase of population per decade declined from 18·1 to 11·9 per cent.; but it again rose under the stimulus of prosperity from 1861 to 1881. In the present state of knowledge the risk of a fresh increase among the helped workers is obviously great. I am not arguing that because of that risk their lot ought not to be improved at once. To argue so, indeed, would only be to imitate the reasoning of some Socialists who point to the primeval struggle for existence as a civilising process, which would have been frustrated if the primeval men had practised family prudence.<sup>1</sup> But these are the arguments of thinkers who, for once or for always, read the problem of evolution backwards. It is our plain expediency, as well as our plain duty, to improve the lot of the wretched at once by national action, accompanying the action by a general recognition of the necessary safeguard. But the true line of

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<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Gronlund's "Co-operative Commonwealth," authorised edition, p. 128. Mr. Gronlund is so reckless as to repeat the twenty-times exposed untruth that Malthus had eleven children. Such are popular Socialist tactics.



action and the safeguard are equally beyond the range of vision of those most concerned, legislators and agitators alike, and we are offered instead a line of action which at best cannot secure the result aimed at, and this with no suggestion of safeguard whatever.

## V.

And at this moment there is especial need of the most strenuous propaganda to prevent a wholly false alarm and a deplorable reaction. The case of France is constantly being pointed to, both in France and England, as that of a nation on the way to extinction through over-restriction of births; and the anti-Malthusians in England triumphantly ask why, with such excessive restriction, France suffers at all from poverty. They are closing their eyes to half of the most essential facts. France is one of the most heavily-taxed countries in the world, sustaining an enormous debt, an enormous army, and a large bureaucracy, and all this under a strong regimen of "saving," which, by curtailing consumption, constantly tends to minimise production, in the teeth of the very motive it brings to production. Yet with all this, France is relatively one of the most prosperous of states, with less rural poverty than Germany and Italy, and much less town poverty than England. Poverty it must have, with its terrific burdens, and its late heavy losses from the phylloxera; but its poverty is not at all proportional to its burdens; and this just because its population has increased so slowly. Let the burdens be lessened, and the marriage-rate and birth-

rate will increase as much as it is desirable they should, as they have increased before for similar reasons. As it is, the figures which have caused the alarm are in large part to be explained by the influenza, which influenced our own birth-rate as well as our death-rate, and which struck France more heavily than it did England. In 1891 there was a general movement back towards the higher birth-rate of previous years, there being more children born than in 1890. But human perversity zealously draws the wrong set of conclusions, and the case of France is turned to the account of unreason and the reign of ignorant instinct, even at a time when reason had made some visible headway.

In the same way, optimistic economists among ourselves refuse to admit the benefit arising from restraint of population in our own newer colonies, even denying that ratio of labourers to employment has anything to do with wages. Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield, noting<sup>1</sup> the statement of the Victorian Government statistician as to the spread of parental prudence in that colony, meet this and other data with the dictum that wages depend, "not on protection, or Malthusianism, or the peculiarities of a new country—or, at any rate, only to a limited extent—but on the power of the workman to produce commodities, and *his ability to obtain a fair share of what he produces.*" It is difficult to infer what economic purport Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield attach to the italicised clause, the gist of which they repeat<sup>2</sup> as if it were either an axiom or a demonstration. As it stands, it

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<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> P. 83.

is a truism, counting for nothing; but their denial that "Malthusianism" and protection have any bearing on wages amounts to saying that the ability of the worker to get a fair share of the produce is wholly a matter either of the efficiency of his unions, or of his power to legislate. And this is refuted by the writers' own admission that wages fell in Victoria before in a period of depression, after the Eight Hours Day had become pretty general, though without involving a relapse to the longer day. If wages fell, it must have been because employment grew scarce relatively to the number of workers. Then restriction of the number of workers tends to keep the quantity of employment relatively high, if demand is not at the same time stinted; and it is perfectly clear, economically speaking, that the continuance of high wages in Victoria is thus far due either to one or other or to all of the three factors of (*a*) migration or re-emigration, with restraint of Chinese immigration, (*b*) extension of field of demand by the continued opening up of colonial territory, and (*c*) protective tariffs, which partly restrict demand to native industry, and keep up its prices; while the practice of family prudence enhances the benefit thus far by limiting the number of helpless consumers, and will tend to secure it in the future by keeping down the rate of multiplication of competitors for employment. In fine, the comparatively successful working of a voluntary Eight Hours Day in Victoria is one of the best explanations of the difficulty of attaining it here, where the conditions are so different. It proves exactly what Messrs. Gibbins & Hadfield loosely deny.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SOCIALISM AND THE POPULATION QUESTION.

#### I.

THE references made to the population question by Socialist advocates of an Eight Hours Law are few but significant. Messrs. Webb & Cox touch on it thus :—

“Many thousands of our countrymen are by nature physical and mental weaklings. The moving force that is to enable these men of their own accord to protect themselves does not exist. To leave them simply alone, and tell them to fight their own battles, is comparable to the advice of Mrs. Dombey ‘to make an effort.’ Mrs. Dombey answered by dying. But that, unfortunately, is what our weakling class will not do. Feckless and infirm of purpose in every other direction, they have animal energy enough to breed. Half of their children die, it is true, but the other half live, and in a few generations the feeble species is almost doubled. . . . The application to them of a coercive law may be defended on the ground that it is the sole means of lifting them from that degradation which is so injurious to the whole community. A legal limitation of their hours of labour would raise them as it has raised the textile operatives. . . . In time this feckless race will develop into a higher type, even as the men and women of Lancashire, themselves once equally degraded, have under similar coercion developed.”

There is here, indeed, scant recognition of the

general tendency of inconsiderate people to breed excessively; but there is a glimpse of it. The question is whether Messrs. Webb & Cox maintain that the men and women of Lancashire have under "coercion" learned to restrict their families. That they should stand to this seems incredible; and yet that thesis is the only supposable alternative to their having simply evaded the population question after having recognised that such a question exists in respect of the breeding of the unfit. I am aware that Mr. Webb, whom at one time I understood to recognise the law of population, has lately, in the *Economic Journal*, taken refuge in the old fallacy that over-population is a future and not a present problem—this while he knows that the working-class death-rate is high comparatively with the birth-rate. If his adoption of this view is to be regarded as the explanation of his evasion of the subject in his and Mr. Cox's joint treatise, I can only submit that these gentlemen are shutting their eyes to the fundamental problem of the case they are dealing with.

## II.

But still more significant is the position taken up by Mr. G. B. Shaw in his debate with Mr. Foote. Mr. Shaw has never repudiated the principle of restraint of population: he only tries to keep it in the distant background. Here is his admission in the debate in question (p. 21):—

"If you pass your Eight Hours Bill, and do nothing else—which is not what I advise you to do—you *will* find that in the

long-run *the increase of population will make wages as low and even lower than they are at present.* But I am only dealing with the Eight Hours Bill as a step to other measures which will meet the population question."

Here is a distinct admission such as, so far as I know, no other advocate of an Eight Hours Law has made, that restraint of hours is vain without restraint of population. And yet Mr. Shaw, like his Fabian colleagues, makes no attempt to bring the need for restraint of population home to the workers. They assume that everybody can understand restraint of hours, but act as if no worker could at present understand restraint of families. And to justify this policy Mr. Shaw resorts to a pretext that is familiar to neo-Malthusians :—

"I will venture to say, further, that the condition in which the long hours of work and the number of unemployed keep the workers at the present time, directly encourages the spread of population. (Hear, hear.) Men who are demoralised by unsteady employment, ground down by long hours of labour when they get work, and vagabondised by loafing about when they cannot get it : *these are the men* to whom it is no use preaching prudence. As a matter of fact, they do not listen to you ; and you find that all your preaching on the population question really touches only the skilled artisan, the man who is in steady employment. *You are actually sterilising the best class of workers* at the same time that the poorest classes are multiplying without any sort of restraint." (Applause.)

Here we have two propositions : (1) that the poorer workers cannot learn prudence, because the *males* are demoralised by unsteady employment ; (2) that the

learning of the lesson of prudence means *sterilising* those who learn it. I have to say that the first proposition is idle and the second worse. The first is the common refuge of those philanthropic persons and Socialists who, knowing the profound importance of the population question, are yet afraid to deal with it practically, for fear of odium. It is a feeble subterfuge. Procreation among the poor as among the rich is a matter concerning both sexes—it is necessary to dwell on this elementary fact—and gestation and parturition are more and not less burdensome to poor women than to rich. And if the wives of the poor were taught, as they could be taught if the Malthusian League were properly supported, how to prevent conception, or at least if they had the means put within their reach, the poorest and most shiftless of them would learn that much of self-preservation. Only female drunkards would be beyond control; and these are a minority; and as it is, their children are either imbecile or still-born.

As to Mr. Shaw's phrase about sterilisation, I only abstain from adequate comment on it because I cannot believe he will stand to it. He must know that it is untrue; that the workers who learn prudence simply have fewer children and rear them better. His reckless words work the complete stultification of his own argument, for he is all the while arguing that the workers *must* learn prudence if all is to go well. He goes on:—

“We must hold that any improvement in the condition of the working classes will really improve our chance of dealing with the population question.”

So that if neo-Malthusian teaching is sterilising the best workers, Mr. Shaw's aim would, in the terms of his own assertion, mean the sterilising of all.

More rational is the following :—

“Above all, considering what a very important question that of population is, we must be careful how we make it a barrier to every sort of advance and improvement. Remember that there is hardly any reform that you advocate on this platform that might not be met by the argument that the increase of population will nullify its good effects, unless, indeed, it were a State measure dealing directly with population itself.”

But the answer to this is plain. A reform tending to promote increase in an ignorant population may be made safe if the mass of those demanding it recognise the need for teaching the necessity of prudence, and actually do so. I have elsewhere urged such reforms on such a condition. But we have not that condition precedent here ; and Mr. Shaw is merely closing his eyes to the prospect when he says that “any improvement” in the condition of the workers will “improve our chance of dealing with the population question.” Would he, if an Eight Hours Bill were passed to-morrow, begin to instruct the workers on the subject ? I must say I do not believe he would ; and I am very sure that if he did he would have few of the advocates of the Eight Hours Law to help him. Most of them have no glimpse of the sociology of the case ; and those who have are mostly afraid to speak out.

And to what lengths the fear of being unpopular among the proletariat on this subject<sup>1</sup> will lead an in-

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<sup>1</sup> In his brilliant propagandist comedy, “Widowers' Houses,” Mr. Shaw takes the ingenious course of putting the phrase, “It's



telligent Socialist, is shown, I regret to say, by another passage in a speech of Mr. Shaw's in the same debate (p. 33):—

“I thought we had given up the notion of trying to restrict the population by self-command. I understood that it had been found practically that this particular sort of self-command was not going to be exercised. As a matter of fact, it is a little hard, you must admit, when you grind down an unskilled labourer to such a point that he has only one thing left in life that he can call a pleasure—his domestic affections—to *ask him to give up that pleasure too*. I understood we had given up asking him to make that sacrifice, and proposed—the neo-Malthusians at least—to try to make him acquainted with methods by which he could limit his family without such a sacrifice. I thought we had arrived at that as the only practical solution. But when you come to recommend these methods to the labouring classes *you will find that they are not adopted because they involve a certain small expenditure, and a certain family privacy*. They may be within the means of the artisan who has a room or a couple of rooms all to himself to live in ; but when you go to the poorest of our population, living several families in one room, with no privacy, and with very little money indeed, even for the smallest expenditure, then, taking these circumstances along with the recklessness which their miserable condition produces, you will find there is no use in preaching limitation of numbers to them at all, either by way of self-command, or anyway else.”

all the increase of population,” in the mouth of his most offensive snob. Nobody knows better that such a snob would be one of the last people to avow a belief in neo-Malthusianism. All the while, Mr. Shaw knows also that population will have to be controlled if London is to be reformed, as his play implies it may be, by the County Council. But he only confesses his knowledge when cornered in debate : in his play he virtually teaches the slummers that the law of population is a formula of humbugs.

Observe the course of the argument. First, Mr. Shaw professes to have given up a notion he had never professed to hold, putting the notion in such a way as to make it signify the first or old-Malthusian view, which he knows is not what he has to deal with. Then he comes to the neo-Malthusian position, which he ought to have come to at once, instead of making capital out of the old thesis that the poor worker should deny himself the pleasures of family affection. On the neo-Malthusian position, he commits himself to the amazing pretence that the use of checks is not adopted among the poor because it involves a certain privacy, *when the intercourse itself goes on without such privacy!* It would be hard to find a stronger illustration of what can be reached in the way of sophistry, when a clever man is determined to make out his case anyhow.

On the point of expenditure, Mr. Shaw is only less self-confounding. He had previously said that only the skilled workers would practise prudence. Now he grants that a man with one or two rooms may practise it. Thus he implies that the danger of over-breeding lies only with the lowest grade of all. Now this is patently untrue, save in the sense that there the resulting mortality is greatest. The lowest grade of all have the heaviest infant death-rate. Over-breeding is going on constantly among the workers who *can* afford the small necessary outlay and *have* the necessary measure of privacy. And despite all that Mr. Shaw and his colleagues may choose to say about the incurable "recklessness" of poverty, this over-breeding goes on because of *ignorance*. If these

gentlemen would take a little pains to discover the facts, they would find that the immense majority of the poorer workers and their wives have no knowledge of the means they might use to prevent conception. As to this the evidence is overwhelming. It is the shocking fact that thousands of poor women in East London chronically resort to the use of drugs to prevent the *results* of conception. And all the while philanthropists of the Fabian and other schools quiet their qualms of conscience with the formula that it is no use teaching the poor anything on the subject. They have never tried to teach the poor anything on the subject. They have not even tried to teach the middle-grade workers. They affect to believe that neo-Malthusian propaganda is sufficiently before the workers of all grades, and that it fails to influence more than a few; when the overwhelming difficulty is, as they might easily ascertain, to extend the neo-Malthusian propaganda, precisely because so many people are as slack as themselves, and so many more who aim at philanthropy are utterly uninformed on this matter.

It is not easy to be patient with those who talk of the present inutility of neo-Malthusian propaganda while thus abstaining from moving a finger to help it. In view of the plain fallaciousness of their way of reasoning, I cannot refrain from concluding that it is their reluctance to face the question openly that primes their argument. I have not the least belief that they would be a whit more forward in facing it if an Eight Hours Law were carried. They would evade the risk of odium as before. And I say this with great regret, because the Fabian writers above

cited, and others who act with them, are among my personal friends, and I am well aware of the moral sincerity of their desire to help the workers, as apart from the intellectual sincerity of their method.

## CHAPTER XV.

### INDUSTRY AND ART—CONCLUSION.

It ought not to be necessary to remind the reader that while the principle of population has been above argued from in refuting the theory that an Eight Hours Law would improve the condition of labour, the refutation has not depended solely on the assumption that population will continue to increase. It has been further shown that the English industrial system, even at the present point of population, is one depending on impermanent conditions ; and that the only valid reform will be one which at once controls population and sets up the beginnings of a system that shall be capable of permanency. I am aware, of course, that Socialists demand an Eight Hours Law as one of the preliminaries to such a system. What I am trying to show is that that plan would only worsen the present situation, in defect of a general prescription and acceptance of the principle of family restraint, which the advocates of the Eight Hours Law never say a word about if they can help it. And a part of the proof of this lies in Mr. Shaw's notable contention that the Eight Hours Law would lead to better things by way of overthrowing all or many of the industries which now make the luxuries consumed by the rich.

That proposition needs to be considered politically as well as economically, as it indicates what appears to be a somewhat popular social ideal. The economic comment was that if such industries were thrown idle by an Eight Hours Law, the situation would at once be desperately aggravated, because thousands of workers would be thrown idle, and necessitated to seek new work. Mr. Shaw argued that they would find work in producing necessities for other workers. But that could not be, unless machinery were abandoned. The extra consumption, by the workers, of boots, clothes, furniture, and such machine-made goods, would easily be overtaken; and the extra demand for food, if less easily met, would still not lead to so much extra demand for labour in this country as would make up for the abolition of a number of skilled industries. New land laws might indeed put people on the land; but the workers are putting their main hopes on an Eight Hours Law instead of agitating at the same time for land law reform; and if it takes years of agitation to secure the former, it will take years more to secure the latter. They are taught to vote against Mr. Morley and Mr. Broadhurst, who are for land law reform and ground rent taxation, because they are not for an Eight Hours Law. And meanwhile the workers multiply.

Much employment, again, might be created by the rebuilding of the worse parts of cities, and of workers' houses generally; but this will not be brought about by an Eight Hours Law. All new building means increase of rents; and instead of arranging for the interception of rents by taxation, with a view to

municipal expenditure which would improve cities, and to the relief of rates paid by themselves, the workers, as aforesaid, stake everything on legal restriction of hours. They will rather return a Tory member of Parliament, who will have no reform whatever, than one who seeks reform by any other method. And the gentlemen of the Fabian Society call them on.

But not only is the method thus ruinous in terms of economics: it is ruinous in the light of sociology. You cannot promote civilisation by destroying half the arts of civilisation in the name of abolishing luxury. That is the theory of a hundred years ago, the theory of Wallace and Hall and the average ascetic. Civilisation is all of a piece. If you abolish its luxurious arts, you will involve in the destruction some of the highest functions of mind and hand. Mr. Shaw's principle would abolish all the best art, all the highest literature, all philosophy, as well as beautiful decoration, and beautiful clothes and furniture; and yachts, and Pullman cars. And supposing men should consent to mutilate their lives in this fashion, what prospect is there that the sacrificed things would ever be regained? If it is, as Mr. Shaw argues, difficult to teach the workers family prudence now, it would then be impossible to inculcate it on anybody, because there would be no visible "higher standard of comfort" to aim at. A population all employed in making necessities would be the maximum population possible, from the point of view of all schools. But a maximum possible population so employed would be one in which no arts could grow. The leisure gained for the

workers—supposing such leisure to be preserved, which it would not long be—could only be spent in the crudest enjoyments, unless they chose to define “necessaries” as including artistic amusements, which would be a curious upshot to Mr. Shaw’s argument.

But there is no case on record of an artistically refined society where there was not a cultivation of all the known arts of production. Greeks indeed might live more simply in many ways than rich Englishmen do; but in Greece there was a constant demand for artistic things; and the new ascetic ideal would put down that as well as “high-living,” oddly so-called. The fact that Greek culture rested on slave labour does not alter the sociology of the case. In the United States, indeed, before the war, there was in the northern states a comparatively high standard of intellectual life with a low standard of luxury in other things; but that was because the States profited by the literary culture of the Old World. And one result of the situation has been a relative backwardness in the native intellectual product, save in a few branches of amusement-giving literature.

Why not say rather that since yachts and draperies and carved furniture and pictures are good things, they ought incessantly to be multiplied? Why not aim incessantly at such multiplication? Such a course is possible, if only men will face the problem scientifically and not empirically; if they will take counsel of knowledge and not of ignorance. Even on the Socialist side there are many who set before themselves the saner ideal of the universal diffusion of luxury; but such Socialists—witness Mr. Bellamy’s



“Looking Backward”—do not any more than the others think out the problem scientifically in detail. Thus on the field of Socialism itself the “ignorant armies clash by night,” with the old prospect that in the end the scheme of the most general ignorance will overpower all others. In the blind clutch at the shadow of compulsory restriction of competitive working hours, the substance of equalisation of wealth is being lost; for first the operation and next the failure of an Eight Hours Law will multiply the resistance to all lines of social reconstruction. It is folly to ignore the fact that a hard and fast restriction of hours of labour is precisely the most irritating of all proposed methods of bettering the lot of the workers. Such a law will at once set up endless forms of evasion; and to meet evasion there will be necessary a multiplication of the means and forms of interference, all setting up new friction, and generating anti-social feeling. And the workers, instead of learning any lesson of self-help, will only call more and more for the delusive help of coercion. As we have seen, labour leaders have talked of a wages law to follow upon a time law; and those who know a wages law to be a chimera, join with these in asking for the time law; though the mass of the workers will be just as likely to insist on a wages law next when the time law works ill. Thus we shall be further and further from a scientific social system, the political beginnings of which are in part even now laid down in the programme of the Liberal party. And all this because, first, the majority of the workers do not think out economic and social problems; and,

next, those who can think them out choose so often to adopt the "cry" that happens to be popular rather than try to win popularity for a wiser proposal.

The one hope of wholesome progress lies in the good sense of the more thoughtful workers, who ought to be the means of guiding aright the rest, they themselves listening to economic and sociological reason rather than to the blind impulse which attacks the symptom instead of the cause. If only they were enlightened by their instructors, instead of being confused, they would go straight enough. It is not the wiser workers who hurrah for Mr. Shaw's scheme of destroying the industries which produce luxuries. But even the wiser workers may be led in that direction by a crude Marxian economics, unchecked by even elementary sociology; and the less wise add to primary error a temper of resentment against those who seek to criticise their course, attributing all opposition to sympathy with capitalism. Arguments such as those of the foregoing pages have been described as "annoying" by partisans of the Eight Hours Movement. I have only to say, once for all, that in all human history I have seen only one kind of security for the solution of any kind of problem whatever, and that is the combination of zeal with knowledge. Much reasoning may fail to bring the true knowledge; but the zeal which will not stay to reason needs no reasoning to rebut it.

THE END.

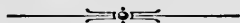




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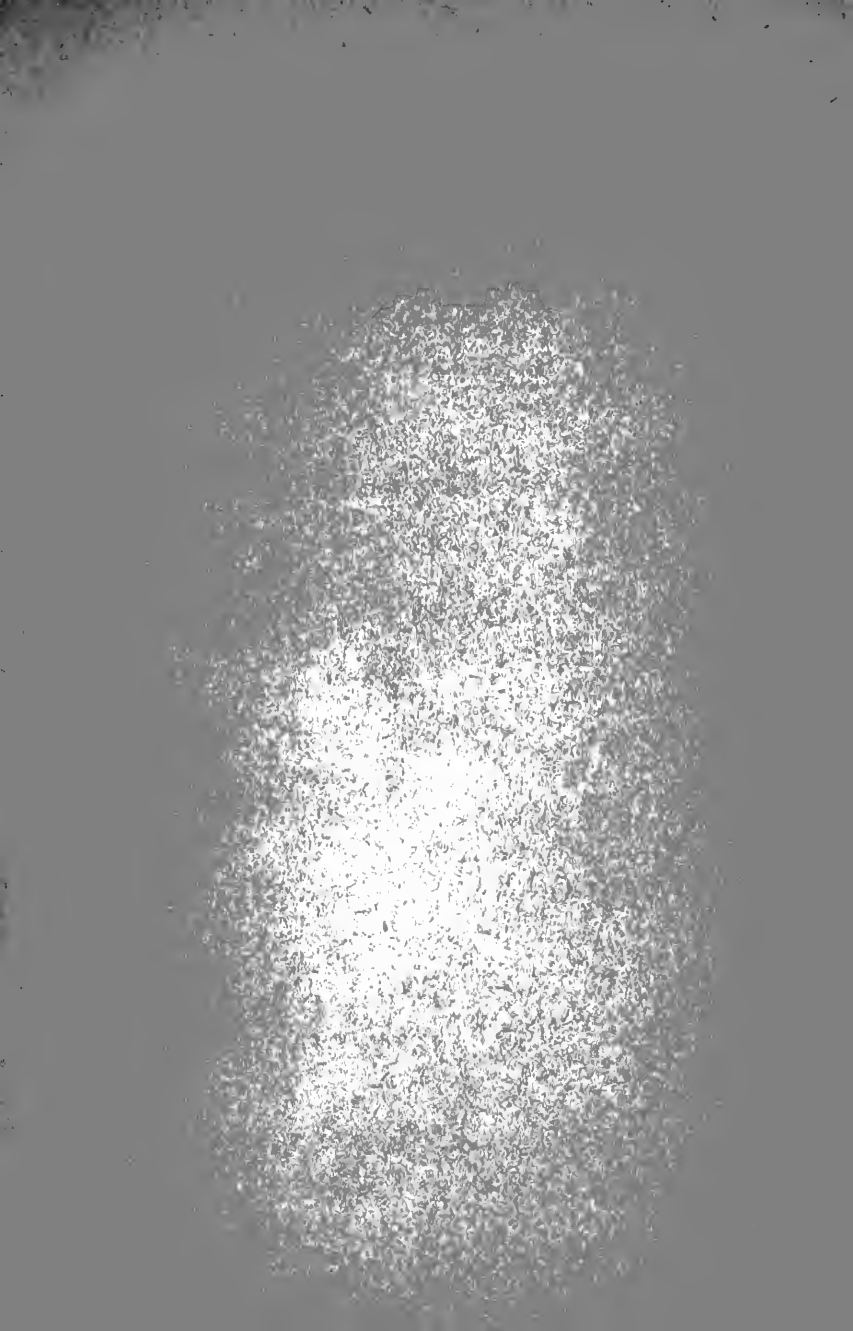
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